The New Ecozoic Reader

Critical Reflections, Stories, Dream Experiences & Practices For An Ecological Age

Number 9, September 2025

RELIGION AND ECOLOGY

The historic mission of our time is to reinvent the human at the species level, through critical reflection, within the community of life systems, in a time-developmental context, through story . . . shared dream experience [and practice].

—Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*

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Contents

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MISSION OF THE CENTER FOR ECOZOIC STUDIES

The mission of the Center for Ecozoic Studies is to advance ecology and culture as the organizing principles of societies, through research, publications, education, events, arts, and action. CES emphasizes critical reflection, story, and shared dream experience as ways of enabling the creative advance needed to bring into being a new mode of human civilizational presence, and also of discerning the practical steps leading to the Ecozoic. CES understands the universe as meaningful, continuously evolving, and relational. In such a universe, the Ecozoic is not something to be arrived at, but something ever to be created. Its hallmarks are inclusiveness, interdependence, and appreciation; communion, differentiation, and subjectivity; and sensitivity, adaptability, and responsibility. It involves more just and cooperative relationships among humans, as well as transformed relationships of humans with the larger community of life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mary Evelyn and John would like to thank all those who have brought this book to fruition, especially the authors, many of whom have been long-term partners in birthing this field of religion and ecology over the last three decades. We are also grateful to our friend and former geology colleague at Bucknell University, Craig Kochel, for his arresting pictures.

We are indebted to all the editors, especially our fellow Forum team members, Sam King and Sam Mickey as well as our long-term colleague in the Great Work, Herman Greene. This wouldn't have been completed without him and the valuable assistance of Laurie Cone and Donald Arbuckle. Of course, our special thanks goes to Thomas Berry, Ted de Bary, and Tu Weiming who educated us in the history, texts, and spirituality of the religions of the world over several decades.

FOREWORD

Dr. Iyad Abumoghli

It is a deep honor to offer these words in introduction to this powerful and timely volume. I have had the privilege of witnessing how the convergence of religious and ecological worldviews can shape the future of our planet. This issue of *The New Ecozoic Reader* carries that spirit forward with remarkable clarity and courage.

The concept of the "Ecozoic", first articulated by the cultural historian Thomas Berry, calls for a profound transformation in our relationship with the Earth. It invites us to imagine and build a future in which human societies live in harmony with the larger community of life. For us at Faith for Earth, Berry's vision has been a source of enduring inspiration. Our own vision is one of "a world where everything is in balance," a world achieved through genuine cooperation and partnership with faith leaders and communities, grounded in the collective pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda.

This volume reminds us that we are not alone in this work. From diverse traditions and disciplines, the authors gathered here give voice to the spiritual, ethical, and cultural frameworks that have long shaped, and can now regenerate, human–nature relationships. They show that ecology is not just a matter of policy or science, but of story, meaning, ritual, and responsibility, and that lasting solutions lie in bridging the science–policy–spirituality nexus.

What makes this collection unique is its honesty about the complexity of our moment. In a time when nationalism often undermines multilateral cooperation, the essays affirm a shared planetary ethic rooted in interdependence. They do not shy away from the contradictions or tensions in our traditions but rather draw on them as sources of creativity and renewal. They urge us to reimagine not just how we live on Earth, but who we are on Earth.

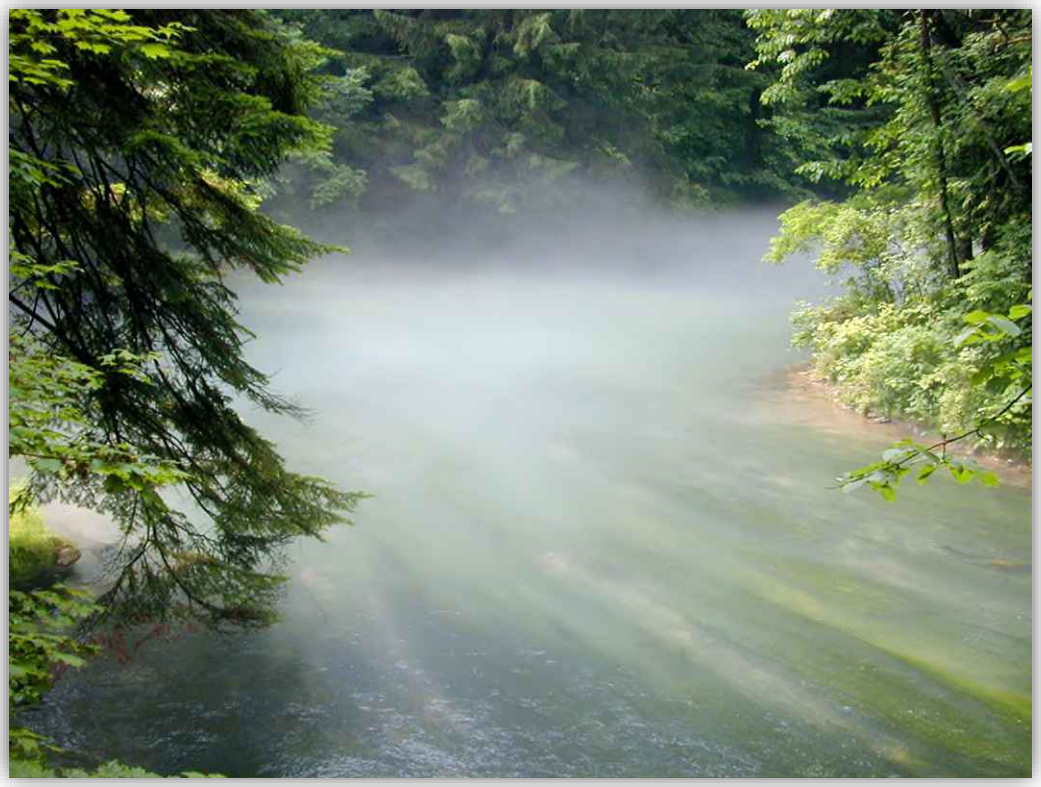
The Ecozoic era is not a destination we will one day reach, it is a path we are called to walk together. That path begins with listening deeply to the voices gathered in these pages.

With deep gratitude to all who contributed, and with hope for the work ahead,

Dr. Iyad Abumoghli
Director, Faith for Earth Coalition
United Nations Environment Programme

PREFACE

Sam C. King and Sam Mickey



During our time of proliferating ecological crises, the academic field and moral force of religion and ecology are matters of urgent importance for any effort to respond to the myriad challenges presented by these crises. It is a privilege and a pleasure for us to serve as guest editors for this special issue of *The New Ecozoic Reader*, focusing on exactly this urgent topic. We hope that this issue is a source of information and inspiration that can support anyone seeking integral community in our ecological age. Along with this brief introduction to the issue, as well as a preface from two esteemed leaders in the field, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, we have gathered essays from twenty-one scholars representing the diversity and abundance of perspectives on the intersection of religion and ecology. The contents of this issue include perspectives from across multiple generations and across the religious traditions of the world. Our contributors look toward the past, present, and future of religion and ecology, so you will find a mixture of retrospective and prospective insights, exploring the taproots that nourished the emergence of this unique area of inquiry as well as new directions that are currently taking shape.

This issue of *The New Ecozoic Reader* covers a wide range of topics, including education, ritual, worldviews, democracy, nature immersion experiences, places, plants, wildness, future generations, and intersectional issues of gender, race, and socioeconomic class. Celebrating the variety of approaches to religion and ecology, we also decided to honor the variety of writing styles from our wonderful group of contributors. Writings are positioned between creative nonfiction and analytical prose. You will also note that the formatting for references varies somewhat from article to article. This is somewhat unconventional for academic writing, but we believe this highlights the importance of learning to welcome differences. Differences and diversity are crucial for bringing forth a more just and sustainable Earth community, transitioning away from the destructive presence of societies that view the Earth through lenses of homogenization, exploitation, and extractivism.

In recent decades, scholars and practitioners of religions have become increasingly engaged with ecological issues, while scientists, policymakers, and activists concerned with ecology have become increasingly engaged with the values of religious worldviews. To be sure, religions are not sufficient to respond to the ecological crises of our age, but it is clear that their moral force—as well as their ecological and cosmological understandings—are a necessary component of the task of transitioning to a vibrant and flourishing Earth community. This issue of *The New Ecozoic Reader* celebrates this empowering and exciting intersection of religion and ecology.

The issue opens with several essays that provide overviews of the historical and conceptual background of religion and ecology. Some contributors address ways that conferences and education have spurred the development of the field, while others look at connections between different ideas, terms, and contexts through which the field has been framed. Following these opening pieces, there are essays that focus on the practices involved in religion and ecology, including practices of cultivating placefulness, nature immersion experiences, and ecologically oriented rituals. Following that, we feature essays that delve into perspectives from specific traditions, covering Asian perspectives on the ecological dimensions of the world religions; Christian perspectives on wildness, creation, and intersectional dynamics of race, gender, and class; Islamic understandings of environmental ethics; and Indigenous perspectives from the Himalayas to North America. The final essays focus on future directions for religion and ecology, from ongoing renewals of animistic ways of life, deepening concerns for multispecies thinking and politics, the problem of extractivism in economies based in fossil fuel and in renewable energy, and the poignantly pressing problems facing the futures inhabited by today's youth.

It is our hope that this special issue of *The New Ecozoic Reader* provides an accessible introduction for those who are new to the world of religion and

ecology, while also providing several paths for deepening the hindsight, insight, and foresight of those who are already engaged in religion and ecology. Although this issue exhibits a wonderful breadth and depth of wisdom, it is only scratching the surface of unfathomable resources for tending to the possibilities facing humankind and the whole Earth community. Our individual and collective futures are precious and precarious, and the writings in this issue serve as robust reminders that we are active participants in facilitating the emergence of these futures. We are part of this unique moment together.

Photo by AgungAtmaja on Pixabay

INTRODUCTION: RETROSPECTIVE AND PROSPECTIVE OBSERVATIONS OF RELIGION AND ECOLOGY

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim

Origin Stories: How Did This Work Arise?

In the early 1990s, when we first began to think of what we as historians of religions might contribute to our environmental challenges, it was becoming clear that the spiritual depth and moral force of religions could facilitate lasting changes. As students of Indigenous religions (John) and East Asian religions (Mary Evelyn) we saw great potential in these traditions for understanding and promoting broadened ecological sensibilities. We were not scientists or policy experts, lawyers or economists who were already working on environmental problems and shaping environmental studies departments. We knew that raising the question of environmental roles of religions in these departments would be difficult, but we did not realize the full dimensions of this challenge.

Now, some thirty years later, we can see that secular academia was quite skeptical of allowing religions into discussions on the environment. Nor could environmental scientists and policy makers acknowledge that religions might effectively contribute to values and behavioral change necessary to shifting our destructive behavior toward ecosystems. It is only now, as environmental crises proliferate, that this possibility is being recognized. Our work at Bucknell, Harvard, Berkeley, Princeton, and Yale was challenging due to the rigorous split between science and religion that is difficult to overcome. Notable exceptions to this have been leading scientists such as Ed Wilson at Harvard, Peter Crane at

Yale, Elinor Sterling at the American Museum of Natural History, Tom Lovejoy at the Smithsonian, Jane Lubchenco at Oregon State University, and Peter Raven at the Missouri Botanical Gardens, who have been steadfast supporters of this work.

The critique of religion experienced from skeptical positivistic scientists is still present. We share some of the concern, namely that religions have their problems, as is evident historically and at present. But religions also have shown their promise in contributing to the moral force of change in issues such as abolition of slavery and the extension of civil rights. That is the hope that the environmental movement will grow from, including the ethical component in making the shift toward a viable future for people and the planet.

Now we are beginning to see openings in which science understands there are multiple ways of managing ecosystems, for example, that include traditional environmental knowledge (TEK). Moreover, change is happening as the next generation of students and faculty understands that religion, ethics, and culture need to be included in solutions to environmental problems. That may be because some eighty-five per cent of the world's people identify as religious. Their influence as leaders and members of institutions and communities is substantial. They have significant educational, financial, social, and political influence that can be used for transformation toward the wellbeing of the Earth community.

With the help of many other scholars and environmentalists, a new field of study in academia and a moral force for change in society was born. While there was no academic field of study in 1995, there are now more than thirty graduate programs in religion and ecology in North America, and three of them are PhD programs. Moreover, there are hundreds of grassroots engaged projects and interfaith efforts that embody the moral force of religion and ecology. Greenfaith is the leading international interfaith activist organization fostering a moral response to the climate emergency and other key environmental challenges. EcoPeace Middle East brings the Abrahamic religions into environmental issues in that region, especially regarding water. On a worldwide level there is now $40 trillion in the divestment movement from oil and gas and 40% of that is from religious communities. Moreover, environmental justice, which arose out of religious communities in the 1980s, is now integrated in academic programs as well as grassroots environmental movements.

Religion and ecology arose from early contributions of many people. A noteworthy beginning was a conference at Middlebury College and the resulting book and film. This was called *Spirit and Nature - Why the Environment is a Religious Issue: An Interfaith Dialogue*. The book was edited by Middlebury professors Steven Rockefeller and John Elder who organized the conference. This was published by Beacon Press in 1992 and the noted journalist Bill Moyers made a film of the conference released in 1991.

The original premise of our work in religion and ecology is that we need to identify environmental ethics from the world's religions that arise from particular cultural contexts. In other words, such ethics will be different in Asia than in the West or among Indigenous traditions. This is what we began to explore as we

Photo by Hannah Vu on Unsplash

convened two "consultations" on Buddhism and Confucianism in the spring of 1996 at Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR). These consultations were recognized as innovative at CSWR and thus we were encouraged by Larry Sullivan, the CSWR director, and Martin Kaplan, a trustee of the Kann Rasmussen Foundation, to continue this research. The Kann Rasmussen Foundation was a key supporter, joined by the Germeshausen Foundation, as well as funding agencies connected with individual religions. We organized a series of eight more conferences on Religions of the World and Ecology from 1996-1998.[1] The papers from these conferences were published in a book series from Harvard (1997-2004). It was the Islamic scholar, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who encouraged us to establish an academic field of religion and ecology as he had begun this work with publications in the 1960s.

[1] For information on this series of conferences and the books resulting from them, see "Religions of the World and Ecology Conference Series, Harvard 1996-1998," Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE), https://fore.yale.edu/Event-Listings/Religions-World-and-Ecology-Conference-Series/Religions-World-and-Ecology-Archive.

We concluded the series with three culminating conferences in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and New York City.[2] These began with one from September 17-20, 1998, on "Religion, Ethics, and the Environment: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue," at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge, where E.O. Wilson and Thomas Berry were part of the discussions.[3] On October 21st, at a daylong meeting at the United Nations in New York we announced the formation of the Forum on Religion and Ecology.[4] The next day we gathered 1000 people for a conference on The Search for a New Ecological Balance at the American Museum of Natural History.[5] There the noted journalist, Bill Moyers, interviewed leading religious scholars as well as scientists, policy makers, educators, and economists on the ethical dimensions of religion and ecology.

Defining Religion, Worldviews, and Cosmovisions

This overview will begin by reflecting on religion, worldviews, and cosmovisions, and then point toward the contributions religions are making toward addressing our environmental challenges, including climate change. Religions have been late in coming to this issue but are now engaging in more effective ways in solutions to environmental problems. That is not to ignore the problematic dimensions of institutional religions, but to suggest that a broadened vision of religion beyond those boundaries is necessary.

Religions connect humans with a divine presence or numinous forces to undertake self-transformation and community cohesion within cosmological and natural contexts. The diverse manifestations of religion can be understood as a means whereby a sense of wholeness and meaning may be generated, while acknowledging the limits and suffering of the human condition. Religions include cosmological stories, symbol systems, ritual practices, ethical norms, historical processes, and institutional structures that transmit a view of the human as embedded in a world of meaning and responsibility, transformation, and celebration. As such, they bond human communities with a numinous presence and can assist in forging intimate relations with the broader Earth community within the context of a life-generating universe.

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[2] Videos from these conferences are available on the FORE website at https://fore.yale.edu/Events/Religions-of-the-World-and-Ecology-Conference-Series-Harvard-1996-1998/UNAMNH-Culminating.

[3] The conference program and list of speakers is available on the FORE website at https://fore.yale.edu/Event-Listings/Religions-World-and-Ecology-Conference-Series/Religions-World-and-Ecology-Archive-11.

[4] Details of the conference are available on the FORE website at https://fore.yale.edu/Event-Listings/Religions-World-and-Ecology-Conference-Series/Religions-World-and-Ecology-Archive-0.

[5] Ibid.

The well-documented environmental crisis has made it increasingly clear that human values and behavior are crucial for the survival and flourishing of all life forms on Earth. Religion, ethics, and spirituality are contributing to the shaping of a vibrant future along with the natural and social sciences. Indeed, more comprehensive worldviews and cosmovisions of the interdependence of life are being recovered within religions, along with an ethical responsiveness of the need to care for life for future generations.

Such interrelational worldviews are also being formulated in evolutionary stories, with multiple narrations drawing on scientific and humanistic modes of knowledge. Our teacher, the cultural historian Thomas Berry, described this in 1978 as a new cosmological story.[6] Our multimedia project Journey of the Universe,[7] inspired by his ideas, is an example of an evolutionary narrative for ecological engagement. It consists of a film, book, a series of twenty conversations, and three online Coursera courses titled "Journey of the Universe: A Story for Our Times."[8]

The exploration of worldviews and cosmovisions as they are both constructed and lived by religious communities is the work of religion and ecology scholars who attempt to discover formative and enduring attitudes regarding human-Earth relations. There are many examples of diverse ecological worldviews in religions. Buddhism sees humans as interdependent with the dynamic forces of nature and the cosmos. Similarly, Confucianism and Daoism affirm nature's changes as the source and expressions of the Dao, with which humans may participate and harmonize their lives. The Western monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam view the seasonal cycle of nature as an inspiration for the challenges of human life. Among Indigenous elders and scholars, the term cosmovision locates nature as the locus for encountering the cosmological power of the sacred, such as kami for Shinto practitioners in Japan, manitou among Great Lakes Native Americans, and mana among Polynesian peoples.

Certain distinctions need to be made between the particularized expressions of religion identified with institutional or denominational forms of religion and those broader worldviews and cosmovisions that animate and articulate such expressions. By worldviews and cosmovisions we mean those ways of knowing, embedded in symbols and stories that find lived expressions, consciously and unconsciously, in the material aspects of particular cultures.

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[6] Thomas Berry, "The New Story," *Teilhard Studies* 1 (Winter 1978).

[7] See the website of Journey of the Universe for a description of the film and related media at https://www.journeyoftheuniverse.org/.

[8] For information about the courses and to enroll, see https://www.journeyoftheuniverse.org/online-courses.

In this perspective, worldviews arise from, and are formed by, human interactions with natural ecosystems. Consequently, one of the principal concerns of religions in many communities is to describe the emergence of local geography as a realm of the sacred. This is evident, for example, with mountains such as Wutai and Emei in China, rivers such as the Ganges and Yamuna in India, cities such as Jerusalem, Rome, and Mecca, and cosmogonies among Indigenous peoples, such as the Hopi creation myth of coming up into this Fourth World.[9] Worldviews and cosmovisions generate rituals and ethics, ways of acting, that guide human behavior in personal, communal, and ecological exchanges. Religions have also helped people to celebrate elemental gifts of nature, such as air, water, and food, which sustain life.

Retrospective Observations

The creative tensions between humans seeking to transcend the anguish of the human condition, and at the same time yearning to be embedded in the harmonies of the world, are part of the dynamics of the world's religions. Christianity holds the promise of salvation in the next life, as well as celebration of the incarnation of Christ as a human in the world. Similarly, Hinduism holds up a goal of liberation (moksha) from the world of suffering (samsara), while also highlighting the ideal of devotion to a god acting in the world, such as the god Krishna, or the goddess Durga. Indigenous traditions also manifest such creative tensions, but broadly considered do not move toward radical transcendence. For example, among the Navajo/Diné of the American Southwest, the Holy People, or Yei, come from beyond the human realm and yet reveal themselves in the inner forms of the natural world.

This realization of creative tensions leads to a more balanced understanding of the possibilities and limitations of religions regarding environmental concerns. Many religions retain orientations toward personal salvation outside this world; at the same time, they may foster commitments to social justice, peace, and ecological integrity in the world. Historically, religions have contributed to social change in the past and now they are doing this for environmental protection and climate action. An example of this is the Govardhan Ecovillage outside of Mumbai in India where we held a conference in December 2017.[10] The tensions within religion were also evident in the conference on the Yamuna River that we

[9] See Jay Jotlewski, "The Hopi Prophecy and the Emergence of the Fourth World. Northern Arizona Living.com, December 17, 2024, https://northernarizonaliving.com/the-hopi-prophecy/.

[10] Information on this conference is available on the FORE website at https://fore.yale.edu/event/Hinduism-and-Ecology-Towards-Sustainable-Future.

organized in January 2011,[11] where the contradictions between the river as sacred and yet polluted stand out.

There are new alliances emerging that are joining social and environmental justice around the world. This has dynamic expressions in a variety of minority communities in the United States, including Indigenous, African American, and Latina. In alignment with these "eco-justice" concerns, religions are formulating integrated environmental ethics that include humans, ecosystems, and other species. A series we have edited at Orbis Books called "Ecology and Justice" has some thirty books in it, including Thomas Berry's Christian Future and the Fate of Earth and Brian Swimme's Hidden Heart of the Cosmos. Religions are active on climate issues such as the transition to alternative energy, away from fossil fuels. We organized one of the first conferences on this issue and published the results in Daedalus in 2001. This was titled "Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?"

Many others have helped lead this engaged work in religion and ecology and climate. These include the National Religious Partnership on the Environment, GreenFaith, Interfaith Power and Light, Earth Ministry, Faith in Place, and Blessed Tomorrow in the United States. The academic organization International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture has been critical in shaping the field of religion and nature. In Britain, the Alliance of Religion and Conservation (ARC) was an early leader and the European Forum for the Study of Religion and the Environment has advanced scholarly research.

Science and Religion: Appeals for Action

Despite years of skepticism, now many scientists acknowledge the role of religious communities for encouraging a broadened environmental ethics from diverse traditions. This acknowledgement provides an interesting background reflection on the tensions between religion and science. From the Enlightenment standpoint of the sciences, religions became suspect because the institutional power of religions controlled the dialogue. And sciences felt religion spoke from a metaphysical standpoint that was unverifiable. Religions were suspicious of science because of the reductive turn in which all reality was explained as a mechanistic materialist process. In this sense, the transcendent and immanent realms of the sacred that are so central to religious positions were not recognized by the scientific community.

Now, in the contemporary period, we are beginning to see some rapprochement between science and religion due to the recognition of the

[11] Information on this conference is available on the FORE website at https://fore.yale.edu/Event-Listings/Yamuna-River-Conference.

profound ecological crises we are facing, as well as an openness to multiple ways of knowing. Religion has tended to dismiss empirical science when it becomes a dominant worldview instead of simply a method. Now historians of science are recognizing that the imaginative character of symbolic consciousness plays a role in the methodology of scientific research and discovery. Religions also see that science is providing the data and discoveries that are making the larger cosmological story of the universe available for broader understanding. While these tensions remain, many scientists and religionists are actively engaged in dialogue to address environmental challenges.

Cooperative efforts between religion and science have emerged over the last forty years around the environmental crisis. Two key documents were issued in the early 1990s. One is "Preserving the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion."[12] A second is "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity,"[13] which was signed by over 2000 scientists, including more than 200 Nobel laureates. This document states, "A new ethic is required—a new attitude towards discharging our responsibility for caring for ourselves and for the earth." Other key documents have built on this call. The Earth Charter, inspired by the UN Earth Summit in 1992 and released in 2000[14] brings ecosystems science, eco-justice, and peace together in an evolutionary framework. The 2015 encyclical of Pope Francis, Laudato Si',[15] is a comprehensive religious statement integrating environmental science with the "Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor." This phrase is the title of a book by the liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, published in 1997 in the Ecology and Justice Series from Orbis Books.

Response to these appeals has continued and expanded. Strong voices advocating religious responses to environmental issues date from over half a century ago. For example, Walter Lowdermilk, who in 1940 called for an Eleventh Commandment of land stewardship, and Joseph Sittler, who in 1954 wrote an essay titled "A Theology for the Earth." Likewise, since the 1960s the

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[12] "Preserving and Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion," (Appeal, Global Forum, National Religious Partnership for the Environment, Moscow, January 1990), https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Preserving%20and%20Cherishing%20the%20Earth.pdf.

[13] "1992 World Scientists' Warning to Humanity," Union of Concerned Scientists, July 16, 1992, updated February 4, 2022, https://www.ucs.org/resources/1992-world-scientists-warning-humanity.

[14] Earth Charter, Earth Charter International, https://earthcharter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/echarter_english.pdf, and "History," Earth Charter International, https://earthcharter.org/about-the-earth-charter/history/.

[15] Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Encyclical Letter, May 24, 2015, Vatican, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr has called for a renewed sense of the sacred in nature that draws on perennial philosophy. Lynn White's 1967 essay in Science on "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis"[16] sparked controversy over his assertion that the Judeo-Christian tradition has contributed to the environmental crisis by devaluing nature. In 1972, the process theologian John Cobb published a book titled Is It Too Late? underscoring the urgency of environmental problems and calling Christians to respond.

Responses of Religions to Environmental Crises

Religious communities, realizing the climate emergency and biodiversity loss along with the failure of nation-states to act resolutely on the environmental polycrisis, are highlighting the complexity of the living Earth community and growing commitments to preserve and celebrate it. For example, Indigenous peoples formulated the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth in 2010,[17] which enhances the ongoing work of the Indigenous Environmental Network. Building on this perspective the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) was formed in 2017 with Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI), Rainforest Foundation Norway, UNEP, and interreligious organizations, such as the Forum, which is a founding partner. It brings together Indigenous peoples with other religious communities, especially Christianity and Islam, for protection of rainforests in Latin America, Africa, and Indonesia.
Religions have held interreligious dialogues for several decades, witnessing to their common concern for both people and the planet. In this spirit, we have organized interreligious panels on religion and ecology at the Parliament of the World's Religions (Chicago 1993, Cape Town 1999, Barcelona 2005, Melbourne 2009, Salt Lake City 2015, Toronto 2018, and Chicago 2023). We have also participated in Buddhist-Christian dialogues and Confucian-Christian dialogues on religion and ecology.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) created a Faith for Earth Coalition in 2019, promoting value-based perspectives on environmental sustainability. This has been skillfully led by Iyad Abumoghli. We assisted with the UNEP publication in 2020 of the book *Faith for Earth: A Call to Action*

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[16] Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis, *Science* 155, No. 3767, (March 10, 1967. A viewable copy of this article is available at https://www.uvm.edu/~gflomenh/courses/ENV-NGO-PA395/articles/Lynn-White.pdf.

[17] Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth (from the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, Cochabamba, Bolivia, April 22, 2010), https://www.garn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ENG-Universal-Declaration-of-the-Rights-of-Mother-Earth.pdf.

which was edited by Kusumita Pederson.[18] The Forum had supported the printing and distribution of fifty thousand copies of an earlier version of this in 2001.

In November 2023 the Muslim Council of Elders along with Faith for Earth convened the "Global Faith Leaders' Summit on Climate Action"[19] to bring a moral urgency regarding the climate emergency to the UN COP 28 in Dubai. We participated in this pre-conference in Abu Dhabi organized by Iyad Abumoghli and colleagues.

Several major international religious leaders have spoken out on environmental and climate challenges. The Tibetan Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama, and the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hahn, have spoken on the universal responsibility the human community has toward the environment and all sentient species. The Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew has sponsored symposia on water which have brought together scientists, religious leaders, civil servants, and journalists. Pope Francis has become a key spokesperson on climate and environmental justice issues. Bishop William Barber, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign in the United States, has emerged as a leading spokesperson for social and environmental justice.

Emerging Field and Moral Force of Religion and Ecology

Within this global context, the field of religion and ecology has emerged in academia over the last three decades. The Forum was brought to Yale University from Harvard at the invitation of the then dean of the Yale School of the Environment, Gus Speth. He had a strong background in law and policy and founded the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the World Resources Institute (WRI), in addition, lead the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). After those many years of public service, he felt that there was sufficient environmental science, policy, economics, law and technology. However, he observed that the moral force and ethical values were missing to move toward a sustainable and flourishing future. Thus, Speth helped create a joint degree program between the Yale School of the Environment and the

[18] United Nations Environmental Program and the Parliament of World Religions, *Faith for Earth: A Call to Action*, United Nations Environmental Programme, 2020, https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/33991/FECA.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. This was an update of *Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action*, which was published by UNEP in 2001 and is available at https://www.unep.org/resources/report/earth-and-faith-book-reflection-action.

[19] Information on this summit is available on the FORE website at https://fore.yale.edu/news/A-Historic-Global-Faith-Leaders-Summit.

Divinity School with social scientist, Stephen Kellert (YSE) and ethicist, Margaret Farley (YDS).

In addition to teaching in this joint program, we have created with Tara Trapani a comprehensive Forum website.[20] This has sections on world religions and Indigenous traditions that includes statements, sacred texts, bibliographies, media, and engaged grassroots projects. Sam Mickey has developed Spotlights,[21] an engaging podcast series of interviews. Elizabeth McAnally edits the Forum monthly newsletter and maintains the website. We have created six online Coursera classes in Religions and Ecology: Restoring the Earth Community[22] with the help of Yale graduates Anna Thurston and Sam King.

Over the last several decades there has been a widespread emergence of the moral force of grassroots religious environmentalism in communities around the world. This includes restoration of forests and fisheries, as well as major efforts to support environmental justice in areas of pollution, such as Louisiana's Cancer Alley, due to oil refineries. This moral force is especially evident in protests against oil companies, banks, and insurance firms invested in fossil fuels. Religious communities have also worked closely with Faith Action on the UN SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals).[23]

Key Questions and Shared Values

This work in religion and ecology is animated by several key questions. Theoretically, how has the interpretation and use of religious texts and traditions contributed to human attitudes regarding the environment? Ethically, how do humans value nature and thus create moral grounds for protecting the Earth for future generations? Historically, how have human relations with nature changed over time, and how has this change been shaped by religions? Culturally, how has nature been perceived and constructed by humans, and conversely, how has the natural world affected the formation of human culture? From a socially engaged perspective, in what ways do the values and practices of a particular religion activate mutually enhancing human-Earth relations? It is at this lively interdisciplinary intersection between theoretical, historical, and cultural research and engaged scholarship that the field of religion and ecology is still emerging.

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[20] Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, https://fore.yale.edu/.

[21] For information on and access to archives of these podcasts, see https://fore.yale.edu/blogs/entry/1632823481.

[22] For information about these course and to enroll, see https://fore.yale.edu/Resources/Yale-Coursera-Online-Courses.

[23] For information on the action being taken by religious communities, see Faith Action on the UN SDGs.

Values embedded in religious perspectives on the environment provide viable alternative views of Nature versus approaching it simply as resources or ecosystem services to humans. The Harvard conference series, and research that came out of those gatherings, identified shared values of the world's religions in the service of the environment. These include: reverence for the Earth and its profound ecological processes; respect for Earth's myriad species and an extension of ethics to include all life forms; reciprocity in relation to both humans and nature; restraint in the use of natural resources combined with support for effective alternative technologies; redistribution of economic opportunities more equitably; responsibility of humans for the continuity of life; and restoration of both humans and ecosystems for the flourishing of life.

While there have been many obstacles to the realization of these religious values, they are beginning to intersect with other approaches to environmental problems from the perspectives of science, economics, law, policy, and technology. These values constitute a means for understanding the dynamic moral force of religious environmentalism and leadership that is growing around the world.

Prospective Directions

One movement going forward in our work these last few years is the unfolding of Ecological Civilization in China.[24] A key goal of this movement is: Moving from an industrial society with unlimited economic growth that is destroying land, air, and water to an ecological civilization that provides a basis for the well-being and health of both people and the planet. Many individuals and groups in China are trying to find the next stage beyond rapid industrialization and unsustainable development, which has brought massive economic growth, but has also caused widespread biodiversity loss, climate upheavals, and intense pollution with public health consequences. Similar efforts are being made in Western countries under the rubric of sustainability.

Ecological Civilization implies a paradigm shift toward an ecocentric worldview, rather than an anthropocentric worldview. This involves drawing on philosophical and religious traditions for shaping a broader environmental ethics and transformative action. The Chinese are reviving their own traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism for ecological wisdom.

While Ecological Civilization is having traction on many levels of Chinese society, especially in education, its implications and efficacy needs to be explored more fully in environmental policy, law, and NGO work. Building and implementing ecological civilization in a systemic and practical manner has been

[24] See "Ecological Civilization," FORE, https://fore.yale.edu/Ecological-Civilization.

discussed for several decades and has been in the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party since 2012.[25] It is our assumption that this aspiration is a vital component of responding to social and ecological challenges. For, in addition to environmental science, policy, law, economics, and technology, a robust shift of values and culture is needed for systemic long-term changes.

We acknowledge the work of many people in this area, in China and in the West. This includes Pan Yue who published an article in 2006 titled "On Socialist Ecological Civilization," which helped to establish the foundations for this idea. Pan was Vice-Minister of State Environmental Protection Administration from 2003-2016. Since 2022 he has been director of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission (NEAC). We have met with him several times in Beijing, as he is keen on promoting Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism for environmental ethics in China. This is complementary to what we were doing with the Harvard conferences.

In the West since 2006 there have been annual conferences on Ecological Civilization in Claremont, California. These have been convened by the Whitehead-inspired Center for Process Studies and the Institute for Postmodern Development of China (IPDC) under the leadership of John Cobb, David Ray Griffin, Zhihe Wang, Meijun Fan, and Philip Clayton. We have hosted the Chinese scholars from these conferences at Yale several times. Zhihe Wang has helped to establish some thirty-six Process Studies Centers at Chinese Universities. In 2015 Philip Clayton and Andrew Schwartz co-founded the Institute for Ecological Civilization (Eco-Civ).

Conclusion

The study of religion and ecology has made significant progress as an academic field and a moral force over the last three decades. There is much more to be done as the Earth gets hotter and drier, as well as wetter and more unpredictable. Indeed, as these problems grow, there is emerging attention in psychological and chaplaincy work to address eco-anxiety and climate grief.[26] In contrast, diverse expressions of eco-spirituality are appearing that acknowledge the therapeutic character of human-Earth interactions with forests, landscapes, and biodiversity. Novel theories of "differentiated sentience" and a "living cosmos" bridge scientific research with attention to plant and animal signaling,

[25] Ben Parr and Professor Don Henry, "China Moves toward Ecological Civilization," Australian Institute of International Affairs, August 26, 2016, https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/china-moves-towards-ecological-civilisation/.

[26] See "Eco-Anxiety Resources," FORE, https://fore.yale.edu/Resources/Eco-anxiety-Resources.

consciousness, and agency. These explorations of realities, understood as sacred, take place in the context of diverse "spiritualities," often apart from the institutionalized space of organized religions.

As horizons of religion and ecology shift and relocate religious language and terminology, so also roles and understandings of religious personalities are in flux. Such fixed images of priest and prophet, rabbi and imam, sage and sramana, shaman and seer also fade and reappear in novel expressions, responding to our environmental pressures, collapses, and possibilities. Just as entrepreneurs attempt to refocus the doom and gloom expectations of environmental catastrophes into opportunities for alternative ecological technologies and professions, so also ecological insights open new visions of humans in right relationship with a flourishing Earth. Even Thomas Berry, whose prophetic voice lamented the loss of land and biodiversity as "revelatory voices of the Earth," could dimly see an "Ecozoic Age" in which humans interacted with Earth processes for the flourishing of the many life forms. No doubt the growth of religion and ecology arises out of both the realization of our problematic devastation of the Earth, as well as the promise of more restorative and nourishing ways of human becoming.

COSMOLOGY, WORLDVIEWS, STORIES: ENCOUNTERS IN THE FIELD OF RELIGION AND ECOLOGY

Heather Eaton

The field of religion and ecology developed in stages, and distinctly in diverse local, national, and global contexts. From the beginning it represented multireligious and multidisciplinary initiatives. Today, in the fifty years of development and expansion, it is impossible to categorize the field of religions and ecology, as it is vast, robust, active, and impactful. The alliance of religion and ecology has become a multifaceted and global agenda within and outside of academia, institutions, and religions, with a wide spectrum of activities, proposals, topics and approaches. It is uneven, with some expressions more comprehensive than others, and with some efforts more concerned about religion over ecology, or the reverse. At times the focus is on the retrieval of insights, teachings or texts. Others are concerned with religious reforms, (re)constructions and relevance. Still others consider that historical religions need to be transformed and understand themselves within a tapestry of religion within the overarching cosmic and Earth journeys. And another direction is

concerned with the social impacts of ecological degradation and global economic and cultural systems that sustain inequities.[1]

The focus here is an overview of the cosmological proposal within the field of religion and ecology, considering some broad themes and observations.[2] There are two primary influential thinkers who associate cosmology with religion and ecology; Alfred North Whitehead and those using process theologies, and Thomas Berry, a cultural historian. This essay is a short exposé on Berry's proposition and those who developed it in the field of religion and ecology.

The cosmological proposal is a composite of the significance of origin stories, narratives, science, and religion in the face of the ecological crisis. It is meant to propel cultural transformations. This essay is divided into five sections: stories and worldviews; cosmology, a new story?; religion, ecology and cosmology; debates and discussions; and future directions.

Stories and Worldviews

Before delving into contemporary cosmological contributions, a key element is to reflect on the significance of creation, or origin, stories.[3] Such stories have arisen from human cultures for at least two hundred thousand years.[4] These stories provide horizons of meaning, worldviews, and an orientation towards the cosmos, the Earth, the natural world.[5] As well, they specify tenets for social relations, ethics, sexuality, birth, death, and suffering. They teach us how to live.[6]

Origin or creation stories can be considered akin to worldviews, social imaginaries, or life-maps.[7] They provide existential orientations—navigational maps—from the farthest reaches of time and space to our interior perceptions and pressures. These stories give guidance on how to grapple with human exigencies and life events, including how to interpret everything from weather to emotions. They specify boundaries between benevolence and malevolence. There

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[1] The website of the Yale Forum of Religion and Ecology is one source where most of the publications, events, conferences, educational programs, and websites related to this field may be found. See https://fore.yale.edu.

[2] The field of religion and ecology is now extensive, with local, national and international organizations. Much influential work exists from the United Nations to community rituals. Some, for example, eco-spirituality contributions, are many in number and kind, tend to be creative, and have fewer conventions and restraints than academia.

[3] For this essay, and to avoid repetition, I am using the terms origin or creation story, worldviews, social imaginary, cultural narratives, and visions in similar ways.

[4] Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave*.

[5] Eaton, "The Human Quest to Live in a Cosmos."

[6] Berry, "The New Story."

[7] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*; The Worldviews Group; Cummings Neville, "Worldviews."

are countless variations, with aspects that can be magical, imaginative, powerful, graceful, and elegant. They have been told, sung, danced, carved, painted, sewn, or transcribed, and at times within ceremonies, fasting and feasting, and with sacrifices and celebrations.[8]

Furthermore, humans, individually and collectively, construct and live within narratives. Jonathan Gottschall explains why, and how, humans are the story telling animal.[9] Gottschall shows that we are always living within and reconstructing existential dynamics and interpreting these within narratives. These stories codify a variety of experiences: cognitive, emotions, psychic processes, communication, education, and more.

Thomas Berry, a key founder of the field of religion and ecology, also verified that all societies live within some form of cultural narrative; that is, a worldview that allows us to make sense of the natural and social worlds, and with themes validating that life is worth the struggle.[10] Narratives seem to be the organizational architecture of the human mind. By extension, narratives are the main organizational structure of worldviews. These stories are the narratives around which life is oriented. They guide and shape our personal and collective identities, life purposes, actions and interactions, and presume to represent reality. Outside a story, there is no context in which human life can function in meaningful ways.

In addition, each of these stories, to varying degrees, explains and symbolizes human emergence from, entanglement with, embeddedness in, or belonging to, Earth processes. They teach how we are to abide within the larger realms, such as the cosmos, the natural world, and what Jane Bennett calls "vibrant matter."[11] Some versions, such as in the Lakota idiom, "all my relations," denote an interconnectedness of matter, spirit, and reverence. These cultural narratives provide horizons of meaning and details of how to live, from the micro-, meso-, and macro-parameters of human existence. They are neither true nor false. Worldviews function or not. Not to be naïve, some harbor notions of slavery, misogyny, ethnic and racial inequalities, homophobia, and devaluing the natural world.

Cosmology: A New Story?

Scientific knowledge, amassed mainly in the past century, has contributed to genuinely new understanding of Earth's interconnected evolutionary and cosmic

[8] Eaton, "In the Beginning: The Universe was Dreaming."

[9] Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animals,* and Deacon, *The Symbolic Species*.

[10] Thomas Berry bibliography: https://thomasberry.org/bibliography/. Eaton, *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry*.

[11] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

processes. Berry realized that the contemporary understanding of the universe is revelatory, as well as relevant to current issues. Rather than being static and stable, the universe is dynamic and transforming.[12] What is increasingly astonishing is that everything about the universe is so much more than assumed or imagined previously. Evidence confirms the complexities, diversifications, development sequences, and the intricacies and inter-relatedness of the emergent universe. There is a cohesiveness within the astonishing diversity found in how the universe functions, including in the birth and death of stars, and galaxies and planetary formations. This understanding, coupled with current evolutionary knowledge, affirms that we emerged from, belong to, and are a living element of, a living universe and Earth.

While the universe, the Earth, and human existence are not "stories." narratives are the central modality of the mind, of social organization, and of overall life-orientation for hominids. The connection is that many cultural stories no longer include tenets and edicts of how to live without harming ecological integrity. The cavalier attitudes towards and devastating destruction of the natural world in Eurowestern societies are embedded within the worldviews and cultural stories. Stories and visions of progress, economic accumulation, protectionist politics, and other-worldly religious views infuse Eurowestern worldviews.[13]

The cosmological proposal is that the scientific insights can contribute to a renewed ecological orientation, and in the form of story. Story is the most apt form for this new knowledge, and for the necessary transitions. It has the potential to galvanize the deepest human energies to respond to the dire social and ecological decline. A new vision—cultural story—sufficiently potent to transform the fundamental orientation of Eurowestern societies is needed. These facets of cosmology—stories, worldviews, evolution, and a living universe—are what became dialogue partners within the emerging field of religion and ecology.

Religion, Ecology, and Cosmology

Religious origin stories, worldviews, and values have always conceptualized human-nature relations. With the increasing awareness of ecological ruin, many engaged in the retrieval of pertinent texts and traditions, developed eco-justices and environmental ethics, and addressed anthropocentrism. Others engaged in critiques, noting that Eurowestern, predominantly Christian/capitalist stories and worldviews are strewn with fault lines that see ecological ruin as irrelevant,

[12] Tucker and Grim, *Living Cosmology*. Eaton, "An Ecological Imaginary: Evolution and Religion in an Ecological Era."

[13] The focus here is the development and legacy of Eurowestern societies, although these concerns exist elsewhere in the world, with distinct reasons.

or even necessary for progress. Anthropocentrism and the devaluing of the natural world were exposed throughout the beliefs, values, cultural commitments, and practices. The critique was incisive and widely confirmed within the multi-disciplinary realms of environmental studies.

Photo by Robert Lukeman on Unsplash

There is a tension between the problems within, as well as the potential of, religions in an era of ecological decline. For example, some problems occur where anthropocentrism is inextricably connected to notions of salvation and spiritual priorities. Thus, it was inevitable that the foundations of Eurowestern cultures are anthropocentric and or have an embedded contempt for the natural world. Much has been written about this, especially within Christian traditions. Nevertheless, many realize that, with varying degrees of reformation, the potential of religions to be influential in the work of worldview transformation is great. This became a central preoccupation in the field of religion and ecology. Yet, religious literacy is insufficient in religion and ecology work.

Furthermore, not all could appreciate the radical—to the root—of worldview critiques. A sustained analysis is required to see that social and ecological destruction are rooted in worldviews. This worldview challenge goes beyond the methods of retrieval, reinterpretation and reconstruction, and nuanced critiques. Adding cosmology to the worldview discussions is much more than

deconstructing anthropocentrism, affirming religion's legitimacy, or prescribing eco-social change. It means a new orientation for cultures whose creation stories or worldviews arose in very different times, with distinct challenges, without contemporary science, and with little to no guidance on how to respond to the dire state of ecological crises.

Neither of these notions—worldviews or cosmology—are habits of mind. That societies live within stories which shape identities and social priorities is also eclipsed from habitual awareness. They are unfamiliar topics and are not probed or interrogated. The urgency for a renewed worldview for ecological destructive societies is evident. Yet, worldviews are perplexing to understand, and even more so to change. Furthermore, worldview analysis clears debris and exposes concealed influences but does not lead to a new vision. We need an ecological vision: a new story. However, the question is thought provoking. Which story or vision? Whose? In whose interests? How can a community decide which to embrace? What will inspire? What about previous stories? There are diverse and competing visions, and the processes of change from one social imaginary to another are not straightforward.

When religion, ecology, worldviews, and stories are gathered together in a cosmological proposal, the challenges augment. Given the immediacy of the quotidian, increasing ecological strain, and pervasive injustices, it is not apparent how the dynamics of the universe, Earth's evolutionary pathways, or interrogating who humans are in the scheme of things are relevant. To go further, in his 1993 book, *The Dream of the Earth*, Berry wrote, "We cannot do without the traditional religions, but they cannot presently do what needs to be done. We need a new type of religious orientation."[14] He proposed a cosmology of religions: a new religious and cultural orientation, with primary reference points of cosmogenesis, evolution, and the biosphere. This new story, or cosmology of religions, would not erase other stories and is not a new religion. It is a complex insight to see that cosmology is the primary reference for all origin stories and cultural worldviews. It has the potential to reshape our worldviews with ecological integrity.

Debates and Discussions

Worldviews and cosmological considerations, initially brought forward by Berry scholars, were illuminating for some, and challenged or resisted by others. While many appreciated the relevance of cosmology and the need for a "new story," others took protectionist stances concerning their religious truth claims, origin stories, doctrinal veracity, and ultimacy. From another angle, there was a

[14] Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, p. 87.

knee-jerk postmodern reaction rejecting the notion of a new story, assuming it was another Eurowestern hegemonic tyranny, and noting that the world is awash with stories that are all relevant to specific cultures and subjectivities. Worries that global/whole Earth/cosmological viewpoints would erase the local, or cultural distinctiveness appeared and then faded. It also took time to see how cosmology is relevant to injustices, structural violence, systems of oppression, and poverty. Those adding cosmology to the religion and ecology agenda clarified, explained, and discussed these tensions regularly. These debates took a few decades to resolve and eventually subsided.

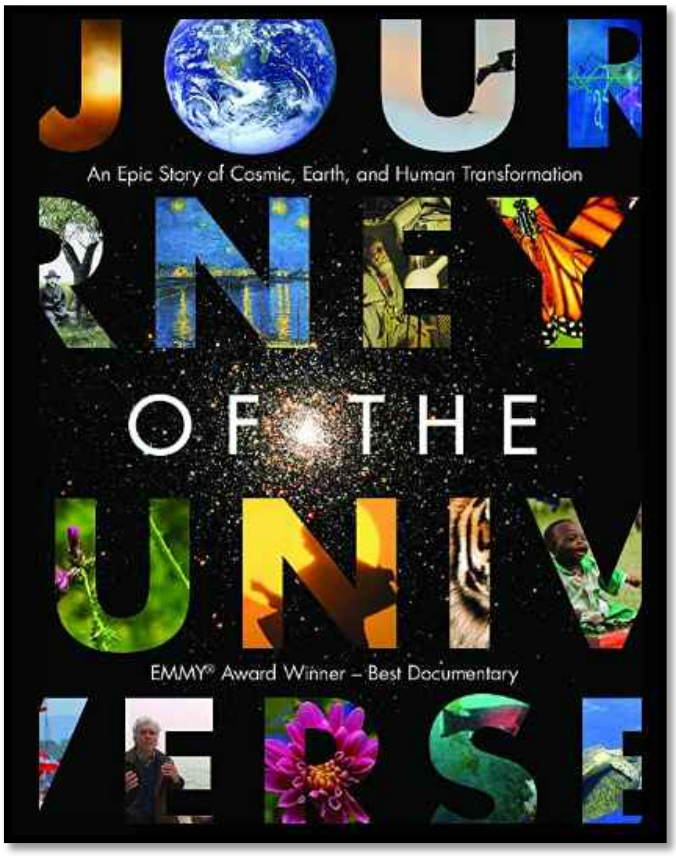
Those engaged in inter/multi-religious work usually have supple religious boundaries and sophisticated theories of religion, which are useful in this field. However religious studies are somewhat allergic to claims about a sacred, spiritual, mysterious, or a numinous dimension, and often delimit religions to social constructions and functions. Theologians, being more confessional, can more readily embrace these claims, but are often without interest in or instruction on the histories of religions or theories that relay the significance of religions. They make assumptions that these cosmological proposals are an addendum to a classical Christian worldview. However, the cosmological proposal in religion and ecology is about cultural change, not only the customary academic efforts that excel in deconstruction, analyses, critiques, and expositions. A composite constructed proposal does not suit all academic endeavors.

Some continue to disregard the relevance of cosmology and interpret it as stargazing. They have not yet understood this cosmological proposal or the magnitude of the ecological crisis. They miss the point entirely of the significance of new cosmological and Earth sciences, of the import of origin stories and worldviews, of replacing anthropocentrism with cosmic or Earth-centered approaches, and that ecological literacy is required. Yet, across disciplines, the need for coherent unifying eco-cultural narratives is established, with a multitude of terms that re-embed humans within the rhythms and limits of the natural world, and as one member of a living Earth community.[15]

Future Directions

Since the introduction of cosmology to the religion and ecology field, much work has been undertaken. Some initiatives that include a cosmological dimension can be found within the ongoing work of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, the Journey of the Universe project, and recently the Ecological

[15] Mickey, Tucker, and Grim, *Living Earth Community*.



Journey of the Universe, https://www.journeyoftheuniverse.org/film

Civilization initiatives.[16] The work in integral ecology includes cosmological and Earth sciences at times. Outside of academia, programs such as the Earth Charter, Democracy of Life, and Global Ecology, for example, use terms such as bio or eco-democracy, eco-cosmopolitanism, bio- or eco-centrism, and ecological imaginaries. They are promoting ideas such as planetary solidarity, ecological citizen, planetary subject, and more. While not all see cosmology as relevant, they share a main goal to connect social and ecological issues and to replace anthropocentrism and resource-based environmentalism with ecological literacy and notions of an Earth community. The gist is that there is a broader context of nature, and that the world is only partially formed by human ideas and models of the world/Earth. We tend to ignore that we live within a thin layer of culture within immeasurable layers of a natural world and are a living part of an emergent cosmos. All these are interwoven within this cosmology proposal in the religion and ecology work and elsewhere.

[16] FORE: Journey of the Universe Project: https://www.journeyoftheuniverse.org; Institute for Ecological Civilization : https://ecociv.org/what-is-ecological-civilization/; Ecological Civilization https://fore.yale.edu/Ecological-Civilization.

Although we are immersed in the current and continuous troubles of violence, wars, political corruption, economic stress, climate changes—and these seem never-ending and even accelerating—they are only fragments of reality. The daily grind of social injustices, the rise of right-wing politics, migrants and socially displaced people, cyber-bullying, a decrease of public civility, and a post-truth world saturated with mis- and dis-information diminishes awareness of, and concern for, the more-than-human world. These difficulties may determine the fate of human communities and severely impact the rejuvenating capacity of the Earth community. Furthermore, there is a ubiquitous denial of the magnitude of the ecological crisis, which will terminate the Cenozoic era. And yet, this does not change that we are also immersed in planetary processes, which are part of one solar system, in one galaxy along with up to two trillion other galaxies. None of our preoccupations alter that we are part of the evolutionary dynamics of an incredible Earth community, which is ongoing for 4.5 billion years—long, long before us—in an ever-evolving cosmic drama.

While many people appreciate the astonishing images from the James Webb telescope, what is needed is to continue to connect these more comprehensive realities to human identities, concerns, and priorities. For those for whom cosmology has transformed their awareness and is a teacher, the associations with daily living are obvious. To live fully in an emergent cosmos, and participate in the journey of the universe, can be difficult in postmodern, aggressive capitalist societies. Yet, the work is to connect human, Earth community, and the cosmic journey. The magnitude of the crisis requires nothing less.

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THE KINSHIP OF VEDĀNTA, GANDHI, AND DEEP ECOLOGY

David Haberman

The environmental philosophy or movement known as deep ecology is a hugely popular form of environmental thinking that informs a large number of environmental movements worldwide, at least in its moderate form. It is often said to have a spiritual quality. Self-identified deep ecologists are found in a great variety of countries: in addition to the Norwegian founder of deep ecology, Arne Naess, one might mention Bill Devall, George Sessions, Michael Zimmerman, Dave Foreman, Joanna Macy, Gary Snyder, and Doug Tompkins in the United States; Alan Dregson and David Orton in Canada; Yuichi Inoe in Japan; Pat Fleming in England; John Seed, Freya Mathews, and Warwick Fox in Australia; and to a certain degree Thich Nhat Hanh in Vietnam and France and Sunderal Bahuguna in India. Virtually all of the so-called "radical" environmental groups such as Earth First!, Greenpeace, Sea Shepherds, and many animal rights groups such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) identify with deep ecology, but it has also had a strong influence on many other environmental groups worldwide. Moreover, deep ecology has had a broad impact on the green movement by providing a principled platform for Green

parties, political ecologists, and professional environmentalists, as well as an ethics for ecovillages. Thomas Berry had a very favorable view of deep ecology.

Core principles of deep ecology include the concept of biological equality, a radically interconnected conception of self—called the Deep Ecological Self, and the process of self-realization. If these concepts sound Vedāntic, I aim to demonstrate that is because they are—although this point has not been commonly recognized. What I want to highlight is that many of the movements mentioned above owe significant foundational ideas to Mahatma Gandhi. Specifically, I want to make clear that this global form of environmentalism is in many ways an application of Gandhi's Vedāntic ethic to environmental challenges. Moreover, this consideration leads to a distinctive understanding of the close relationship between social justice and environmentalism.

In formulating his own ideas, the founder of deep ecology, Arne Naess, drew heavily on the teachings of Gandhi, who in turn based his ideas largely on the teachings available in Vedānta texts. The term "Vedānta" means literally "the culmination of the Vedas," and it is specifically based on the early Sanskrit scriptures of the Upanishads, Brahma Sūtras, and Bhagavad Gītā texts which have played a central role in Hindu thought. If one looks through Gandhi's journal entries in the ninety volumes of his collected works,[1] one quickly sees that Gandhi read and reread Vedāntic texts during his long stays in jail—especially the *Brihadāranyaka* and *Chāndogya Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*—and that these were the texts he quoted most frequently in his speeches, letters, and sermons. Although Gandhi believed all religions are valid paths to truth, he wrote in 1925: "I must say in all humility that Hinduism, as I know it, entirely satisfies my soul and fills my whole being, and I find solace in the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads."[2] Importantly, he was drawn to Vedāntic teachings regarding the unified nature of reality and the self. Exemplary expression of this position can be found in such passages as *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, verse (2.5.14-15):

> "This self (*ātman*) is *brahman*; it is the Whole. This very self is the lord and ruler of all beings. As all the spokes are fastened to the hub and rim of a wheel, so to one's self (*ātman*) are fastened all beings, all the gods, all the worlds, all the breaths, and all other selves (*ātman*)."[3]

Or perhaps stated more succinctly in verse 3.5.1: "The self within all is this self of yours."

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[1] *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1988).

[2] *The Spectator*, November 30, 1929, p. 22.

[3] Translations of the Upanishads are drawn from the translation of Patrick Olivelle, *Upanishads* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

These and many other such verses give voice to the overall theme of the Upanishads, which is ontological unity—the belief that everything is radically interconnected. The Upanishadic view of reality recognizes the simultaneity of unity and diversity, since the world of multiplicity is understood to be an expansive and ongoing expression of infinite unity. Comprehension that all life is interconnected has clear implications for views of the self. The central assertion of Vedāntic literature is that our essential self—the *ātman*—is nondifferent from the totality of all reality that is *Brahman*. This is prominently expressed in celebrated concise "great sayings" (*māhavākyas*): such as "I am Brahman" (*aham brahmāsmi*), and "You are That!" (*tat tvam asi*). The ultimate self, then, according to Vedānta is not an autonomous unit operating independent of and in competition with other beings, but rather is part of this larger, deeper, interrelated network of being. On a down- to-earth level, this means that our kin are not only fellow human beings, but all other kinds of beings as well. The human predicament, according to the Upanishads, however, is one of ignorance and false identity. Instead of identifying with the *ātman*, the essential self connected to All, we identify with the much more narrow and constricted ego self (*ahamkāra*), which regards itself as separate from all others. This is the root of all our ills. The primary aim of the Upanishads is to bring about a shift in identity from the illusory ego self to the true self, which is non-different from the All. Many Vedāntic thinkers, including Gandhi, have called this process "self-realization."

These are the ideas Gandhi inherited from his immersion in Vedāntic literature, and from which he drew as he gave expression to their ethical implications in the form of social justice and compassionate nonviolence. He identifies his life-goal in the introduction to his own commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā: "What I want to achieve—what I have been struggling and pining to achieve these thirty years—is self-realization." Gandhi made it clear that the self he refers to here is not the autonomous ego self, but rather the radically interconnected self of Vedānta. His goal was to identify with all life: "The ocean is composed of drops of water; each drop is an entity and yet it is part of a whole; 'the one and the many.' In this ocean of life, we are little drops. My doctrine means that I must identify myself with all life, with everything that lives, that I must share the majesty of life in the presence of God. The sum-total of this life is God."[4] This is all-inclusive identification is "self-realization."

The ethical life for Gandhi, then, does not depend upon dutiful moral sacrifice, but rather on one's capacity for empathetically *identifying* with other

[4] This statement was initially published by Gandhi in *India's Case for Swaraj* (1932), p. 245, but is also cited by Warwick Fox, "Transpersonal Ecology and the Varieties of Identification" in *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, edited by Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1995), p. 146.

beings. One does violence toward other beings when one sees them as "radically other." The ethical life, therefore, depends upon the cultivation of our insight into the true nature of reality and self. Issues pertaining to equality and social justice are all rooted in the non-dual vision of Vedānta for Gandhi, who wrote: "I believe in *advaita* (non-duality), I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives. . . . The rockbottom foundation of the technique for achieving the power of nonviolence is belief in the essential oneness of all life."[5] This Vedāntic notion of self led Gandhi to his life-long commitment to all-inclusive love: "I believe in the absolute oneness of God and, therefore, of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through reflection. But they have the same source. I cannot, therefore, detach myself from the wickedest soul, nor may I be denied identity with the most virtuous."[6] The true test of the all-embracing vision of the Vedāntic self is that great compassion must even include one's own enemies: "It is not non-violence if we merely love those that love us. It is non-violence only when we love those who hate us."[7] Animated by these ideas, Gandhi's life work focused on fighting the inequality and social injustice inherent in both colonialism and the caste system.

Importantly, however, Gandhi's ethic—based on the non-dual vision of Vedānta—does not stop at the boundary of the human. Seemingly aware of the resistance to Darwin's teachings in the Tennessee Scopes Monkey trial of 1925, he wrote: "My ethics not only permit me to claim, but require me to own kinship with *not merely the ape*, but the horse and the sheep, the lion and the leopard, the snake and the scorpion."[8] Gandhi was well known for not allowing trees to be cut or snakes to be harmed in his ashram. The identification with all life leads to an ever-expanding ethics, taking more and more into its ever-widening circle of compassion until it finally includes the Whole. Gandhi writes,

> My religion embraces all life. I want to realize brotherhood or identity not merely with beings called human, but I want to realize identity with all life, even with such things as crawl upon the earth. I want, if I don't give you a shock, to realize identity with even the crawling things upon earth, because we claim descent from the same God, and that being so all life in whatever form it appears must be essentially one.[9]

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[5] Mohandas K. Gandhi, *All Men Are Brothers* (Lusanne: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1958), p. 118.

[6] Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India*, September 25, 1924, p. 84

[7] Gandhi, *All Men Are Brothers*, p. 86.

[8] Gandhi, *Young India*, August 7, 1926, p. 244.

[9] Ibid., April 4, 1929, p. 107.

With this last statement Gandhi has moved beyond what is now called in environmental philosophy "anthropocentrism," the belief that humans are somehow separate from and superior to all other life forms. As many are aware, we are facing an unprecedented environmental crisis today involving increasingly massive extinctions. Many have come to understand this as part of a larger spiritual crisis very much related to our sense of self.[10] Gandhi's articulation of a radically interconnected conception of self and all-inclusive compassionate care gained the attention of a young Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, who went on to articulate what was to become the highly popular form of ecological philosophy and activism know as Deep Ecology.

In a widely circulated and influential article published in 1973 and titled "Self Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World," Arne Naess, who came under the spell of and published two books on Gandhi's thought, wrote: "We underestimate ourselves. I emphasize self. We tend to confuse it with the narrow ego. Human nature is such that with sufficient all-sided maturity we cannot avoid 'identifying' ourselves with all living beings."[11] Like his teacher Gandhi, Naess maintained that many of the problems we face today—especially those related to the environmental crisis—have a great deal to do with a flawed sense of self. Via Gandhi, Naess connects his thinking on the true nature of the self with the Bhagavad Gītā, most specifically verse 6.29: "The yogi sees all beings with an equal eye: He sees the self in all beings and all beings in the self."[12] Here are the roots of what were to become two of the pillars of Naess' Deep Ecology: biological or biospherical egalitarianism and the concept of the ecological self. Similar to Gandhi, Naess defined the process of "self-realization"—a term he took directly from Gandhi—as: "the broadening and deepening of *self identification*," and claimed: "Because of an inescapable process of *identification* with others, with growing maturity, the self is widened and deepened."[13] Here is an understanding of self-realization as a process of identification with ever widening circles of inclusive compassion until one has identified with All. To the extent that one sees rigid boundaries, one falls short of deep ecological consciousness. Deep ecologist Bill Devall writes: "The self is not an entity or a separate thing, it is an opening to discovering what some call the Absolute or in Sanskrit, *ātman*. Awakening the self beyond the barbed wire fence the ego has constructed engages

[10] This means that "drivers" of the environmental crisis are not just measurable things such as the burning of fossil fuels and the spewing of toxins into our air, soil, and water, but also conceptual factors such as our conceptions of self.

[11] Arne Naess, "Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World" in *The Deep Ecology Movement*, p. 13.

[12] Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans. David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p, 195.

[13] Naess, "Self-Realization" in *The Deep Ecology Movement*, p. 13 (italics added).

us in the world, in the grounding of being-in-the-world."[14] Deep ecologist and poet Gary Snyder states the matter crisply, saying there is "no self-realization without the whole self, and the whole self is the whole thing."[15] Although Naess grounded his philosophy in the relational science of ecology, especially John Muir's ecological maxim "everything hangs together,"[16] he follows Gandhi's ethic quite closely as is evident in these words: "Through the wider Self every living being is connected intimately, and from this intimacy follows the capacity of *identification* and as its consequences, the practice of non-violence."[17]

At the level of practical environmental action, self-realization—the process of identifying with all beings—involves recognizing another's interests as one's own. Identifying with wider systems of nature leads to the realization that environmental destruction is tantamount to self-destruction. Once again following the direction laid out by Gandhi, Naess maintains that the degree to which we identify our self with the Whole, is the degree to which we will engage in the preservation of the world and its many beings, not out of some self-sacrificing altruism, but rather out of self-defense: "Defending Nature. . . . We are engaged in self-defense."[18] It is in this sense that Naess asserted: "Academically speaking, what I suggest is the supremacy of environmental ontology and realism (i.e., realizing the interconnectedness of all beings) over environmental ethics as a means of invigorating the environmental movement."[19] Thus, as we discover our "ecological self" we will joyfully interact with and defend that with which we identify. The well-known Australian rainforest activist and deep ecologist John Seed says: "I am protecting the rainforest develops into 'I am a part of the rainforest protecting myself."[20] Environmental defense, then, appears as enlightened self-interest (as long as we understand the self here akin to the Vedāntic one). Seen in this light, conservation is a matter of self-defense, springing from a deep existential impulse. Naess writes: "The requisite care flows naturally if the 'self' is widened and deepened so that protection of Nature is felt and conceived as protection of ourselves."[21]

I pause for a moment to consider just what kind of Vedānta is it that Gandhi promoted. I raise this question because there are many schools of Vedānta; not understanding this has led to some serious misunderstandings. Although it is numerically a minority school, Shankarācharya's Advaita Vedānta is a well-

[14] Bill Devall, "The Ecological Self" in *The Deep Ecology Movement,* p. 104.
[15] Gary Snyder, "Re-Inhabitation" in *The Deep Ecology Movement* p. 71.
[16] Naess, "Self-Realization" in *The Deep Ecology Movement*, p. 19.
[17] Ibid., p. 23 (italics added).
[18] Ibid., p. 21.
[19] Ibid., p. 26.
[20] Dewall, "The Ecological Self" in *The Deep Ecology Movement* p. 107.
[21] Naess, "Self-Realization" in *The Deep Ecology Movement*, p. 26.

known school of Vedānta that maintains that the true self is completely disassociated from the phenomenal world, which is ultimately declared to be unreal. One of the tragedies in western understandings and representations of Hinduism is that through the politics of colonial scholarship, the complex and varied schools that make up Vedāntic thought were largely reduced to the singularity of Shankara's Advaita Vedānta, which holds the world to be an illusion. This has led to mistaken assumptions about the kind of Vedāntic thinking Gandhi passed on to Naess. Although Gandhi makes it clear in his own writings that his personal religious roots are in the Vaishnava schools of Vedānta, which hold the world to be real as expressed in the central Vaishnava theological text the Bhagavad Gītā, many have assumed that all Vedānta philosophical schools follow Shankara's negative assessment of the world. In his generally insightful study of Arne Naess, for example, the deep ecologist Warwick Fox unfortunately writes:

> In choosing Gandhi as his exemplar of the philosophy of self-realization, Naess is referring to someone who located himself within his native Indian religious tradition, but who nevertheless went against the grain of that tradition in the extent to which he endorsed the reality of the phenomenal or empirical world. . . . Following the great Indian philosopher Shankara, the dominant traditional Indian metaphysics of Advaita Vedanta impugns the reality status of the empirical world.[22]

Fox concludes that Gandhi stood "Hindu philosophy" on its head—partially under the influence of Christianity—and that Naess followed this upside-down version of Vedānta. The Vedāntic philosophical traditions, however, are much more complex and varied than Fox assumes. After understanding that the numerically dominant Vaishnava schools of Vedānta actually embrace the reality of the world, the whole problem Fox struggles with disappears and there is no need for his wild explanations or head-scratching acrobatics. Schools of Vedāntic were readily available to Gandhi within the Vaishnava culture of Western India in which he was raised that fully affirm the sacrality of the world with all its myriad beings.

In closing, one final point is worth mentioning regarding Naess's attraction to and use of Gandhi's Vedāntic approach to being in the world. Naess was keen to emphasize that deep ecology not only aims for compassionate environmental protection, but also for spiritual enrichment. He highlights the fact that the process of self-realization or identification with all beings not only yields an

[22] Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 108-09.

expanded sense of Self and healthier world for all, but also an enhanced and profound joy. One's capacity for loving joy, according to Naess, is increased to the degree one identifies with a world of beings beyond the limited ego. Joy is a blessed experience for Naess. "Joy is," he maintains, "a feature of the *indivisible*. . . . In a sense self-realization involves experiences of the infinitely rich joyful aspect of reality."[23] Here, then, is a solid foundation for a form of sustainable environmental activism that is well grounded in Gandhi's Vedāntic teachings and has already spread throughout every inhabited continent on Earth. After reading Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment titled "Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home," I was struck by its seemingly deep ecological nature. In this document Pope Francis articulates what he calls ecological conversion as a process of spiritual maturity understood in these terms: "The human person grows more, matures more, and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with *all creatures*" (175).[24] Here is apt expression of the deep ecological notion of "self-realization." Could it be that Gandhi's Vedāntic notions have now found their way into the thinking of our current august pope?

Photo by Dibakar Roy on Unsplash

[23] Naess, "Self-Realization" in *The Deep Ecology Movement*, p. 27 (italics added).

[24] Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, section 242. The text of this encyclical is available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

EDUCATION FOR THE ECOZOIC: EMERGING DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF ECOLOGY, SPIRITUALITY, AND RELIGION[1]

Elizabeth Allison

> *Earth is in the midst of a great transition: humanity, having become a planetary force, is now shaping both its own future and the long-term future of millions of living species. The magnitude of this process demands broad societal transformation—a challenge that occupies many of the world's most vibrant thinkers and visionaries. Spiritual traditions, too, are engaged in the transformation of consciousness and society. As the moral force of the world's religions joins with the insights of the ecological sciences, humanity finds itself at the very center of the deeply mysterious process by which the Earth community is revitalizing itself.*
>
> —California Institute of Integral Studies

With these words, the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), a small private university in San Francisco, California, in 2013 launched its interdisciplinary graduate program in Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion (ESR) offering master's and doctoral degrees. The new program's mission was to "explore the role of worldviews, philosophies, and religion in understanding and responding to interconnected global ecological crises . . . in

[1] This piece is an excerpt from a previously published article (Allison 2024).

service of a more just, sustainable, and flourishing future," all in the larger context of the cosmic epic of the Universe's 13.7-billion-year evolution (CIIS 2014).

The work of "geologian" Thomas Berry (1914-2009), who argued that the environmental ills of late modernity arose from a disconnection between religions that value the transcendent realm from the specific, material needs of the Earth and its beings, provided foundational inspiration for the program. ESR students and faculty study, among other subjects, the development of varieties of "ecologically sensitive spirituality" across various inherited and emerging traditions that contribute to renewing "religious-spiritual traditions in the context of the integral functioning of the biosystems of the planet" (Berry 2009, 135-136).

Two of the founding faculty members of CIIS, the mathematical cosmologist and storyteller Brian Thomas Swimme and the anthroposophist and former president of CIIS Robert McDermott, had studied with Berry. The collaboration between Swimme and Berry led to the publication of *The Universe Story* (1992). Berry had also mentored the founders of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, during their graduate study. Swimme and Tucker later produced *The Journey of the Universe* (2011). Tucker and Grim, in turn, mentored Elizabeth Allison, the founding and current chair of ESR.

In 2019, the ESR program commemorated the continuing influence of Thomas Berry on the field of religion and ecology with a Religion and Ecology Summit celebrating the launch of a new biography of Thomas Berry on the tenth anniversary of his death (Tucker, Grim, and Angyal 2019). Speakers included colleagues, students, and friends of Berry like Tucker, Swimme, McDermott, the spiritual theologian Matthew Fox, the poet Drew Dellinger, and Sister of the Earth Toni Nash, CSJ (CIIS 2024).

Lessons from a Decade of Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion

Over the past several decades, the emerging transdisciplinary fields of religion and ecology (e.g., Tucker and Grim 2001), religion and nature (e.g., Taylor 2010), and spiritual ecology (e.g., Sponsel 2012) have reshaped thinking about human-Earth relations, exploring the complexity of attitudes and practices related to the nonhuman world in both inherited and emerging religions and spiritualities. Having been founded more than a decade ago, the ESR program is an elder among the more than twenty academic programs devoted to the field of religion and ecology (Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology 2024). Since 2018, seven new programs in religion and ecology—including four in 2022 alone—have been launched in the United States, indicating increasing demand and interest in this

growing field that can contribute to the emergence of the Ecozoic. Over the past decade of experimentation and reflection, the ESR faculty, staff, and students have learned many lessons about transdisciplinary graduate education, emerging directions in the field of religion and ecology, and pathways toward the Ecozoic.

Generative Eco-Spiritual Conditions Create the Context for the Future to Emerge

The Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion program emerged from collaborative and generative socio-intellectual and geo-ecological conditions. A diverse, generous, broad-minded cadre of interested scholars, nourished by dramatic and awe-inspiring landscapes as they thought together, midwifed the nascent program. Social psychology research has shown that experiences of awe and wonder contribute to more pro-social and collaborative behaviors (Keltner and Haidt 2003). The ecological, geographical, and spiritual context—the soaring mountains of New Mexico where spiritual leaders and teachers pass on their wisdom, the wild rocky coasts of California where leading human potential thinkers have gathered for decades, the abundant lands of the fertile San Francisco Bay ecotone tended for millennia by the Ohlone peoples—contributed to the emergent program.

From the founding insights and practices of spiritual connection to place, investigation of a sense of place, long excluded from serious academic and philosophical reflection (Casey 2009), has become an important theme of student and faculty research in the program (Casanova 2023; Forbes 2022; Wellman 2022; Allison 2015a, 2022). The observation that human societies are ontologically intertwined with their surroundings (cf. Basso 1996) shapes studies that seek to understand the qualities of place that influence specific understandings of religion and ecology. As climate change reshapes ecosystems and landscapes, research explores how such changes may influence religious and spiritual practices, and human experiences of value and meaning (Allison 2015b).

Transdisciplinary Education Is Central to the Ecozoic, Requiring Specific Intellectual Skills

Transdisciplinary education that incorporates religion, spirituality, and ecology into one interwoven curriculum encourages (and requires) faculty members and graduate students to drop preconceptions about the superiority of their home disciplines. The ESR program has included faculty with backgrounds ranging from theology to cosmology to anthropology to environmental science. To bridge disciplinary chasms, students and scholars must suspend prior assumptions to embrace “beginner’s mind” (Suzuki, Dixon, and Baker 1970) as

they learn new terms, methods, and approaches. This requires curiosity and humility, as well as patient, thoughtful, generous dialogue. Meta-cognition and self-reflexivity are required to make explicit one's habits of thought and disciplinary practices and to make these legible to others. Employing methodological pluralism, ESR graduate students draw on a diverse array of methods, including those that situate the scholar in the research, such as autoethnography, as well as textual analysis, arts-based research, ethnography, participant observation, philosophical argumentation, narrative analysis and more, to illuminate issues at the intersection of religion and ecology.

Transdisciplinary thinkers must practice reflexivity to become aware of blind spots and gaps in their thinking. Transdisciplinary approaches require attention to the differing ontologies and epistemologies of religions on the one hand and to social, political, and biophysical approaches to ecology on the other. ESR students and faculty direct attention to examining the ontologies and epistemologies that undergird their thinking, making visible the different epistemological principles that guide various disciplinary approaches. Bringing awareness to the ontological and epistemological foundations of the claims of various academic disciplines helps identify ways that different disciplines may speak past one another. Trained epistemological mediators—those who can build bridges between Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, and humanistic, social scientific, and biophysical knowledges—are necessary for navigating the varying epistemological foundations of various sources of knowledge (Allison 2015b).

Global Connections Enrich Ecozoic Education

While the ESR program is rooted in the generative landscapes that birthed it, online education extends its reach across the global noösphere to unite leading edge thinkers including international graduate students and working professionals who cannot leave career and family commitments to move to San Francisco, one of the most expensive housing markets in the United States. The program has included students from Australia, Bali, Canada, China, England, Korea, Zambia, and Zimbabwe and has received inquiries from every continent except Antarctica. A community of like-minded innovators is essential for testing out new ideas: annual in-person retreats allow for face-to-face community building, while robust use of online discussion forums, community Zoom calls, and video presentations allows students to build community online.

Critical and Constructive Approaches Create the Careers of the Future

With its central focus on understanding the role of worldviews, philosophies, spiritualities, and religions in responding to global ecological crises in service of a more just, sustainable, and flourishing future, the ESR program has employed both critical and constructive approaches in its research and teaching. While students critically analyze religious texts and ecological practices, critique of the status quo is insufficient to bring about a world of greater ecological flourishing. Students constructively imagine, create, and iterate new alternatives, practicing "active hope" (Macy and Johnstone 2012) to bring forth the social and structural changes necessary of the Ecozoic era. Graduates are creating the careers of the future that blend rigorous knowledge of the causes and consequences of global ecological change with moral insight and compassion developed through studies of religion, spirituality, and contemplative practice.

Climate Justice Is Vital to the Field of Religion and Ecology in the Ecozoic

As climate change accelerates and the effects of pollution and biodiversity loss become more apparent—leading to the identification of a global "polycrisis" (Lerner 2023)—the urgency of critical, constructive responses centering on

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justice is greater than ever. Pope Francis's two encyclicals on climate change assert that current consumption trends cannot continue, and the highest consumers have a moral obligation to change their patterns (Pope Francis 2023; Pope Francis 2015). Strategies for inclusive, just, resilient adaptation that consider the specificity of culture and place, as the Standing Rock Sioux water protectors have done, are urgently needed. Examining the teachings and practices of nondominant religious and spiritual traditions, "everyday" or "lived" religion, and Indigenous cultures and philosophies has become important to ESR students and faculty who take intersectional approaches to social and ecological justice, creating space for a multiplicity of narratives and approaches, and seeking to broaden the array of interlocutors in religion and ecology.

Funding Is Needed to Broaden and Extend the Field

As is often the case for humanistic fields of study, greater funding is needed to support student scholarships and fellowships for domestic and international students and student and faculty research on emergent issues such as the spiritual implications of the global melting of ice, the "vegetal turn" in philosophy and theology, and queer spiritual ecology. Greater funding, especially for under-represented students who can bring religious and ecological literacy into environmental work, and those who wish to do field research, would support the critical work of developing culturally relevant pathways to ecological resilience. Supporting the development of new applied projects at the intersection of religion and ecology would help students and alums create the Earth-healing careers that are needed to promote resilience, religious response, and spiritual renewal in relation to climate change.

Reflection, Re-Evaluation, and Renewal Are Critical to Continued Vibrancy

New scientific challenges and discoveries call for reflective thinking in religion and ecology. Emerging ethology has offered greater insight into animal minds, suggesting ways in which they may share some moral and emotional capacities with humans, which may in turn affect human ethical judgements (Bekoff and Pierce 2009; Safina 2015). Likewise, the "vegetal turn" in the humanities has drawn attention to the agency of plants, correcting the Western ontological and extractive tendency to see plants and trees as mere resources (Paco et al. 2020; Kimmerer 2013). Climate change and geoengineering, extractive industries, Large Language Models, artificial intelligence, CRISPR, genetic engineering, and mass extinction of species are reshaping our understandings of life with concomitant implications for religions, spiritualities, and worldviews.

Contemplative Practice and Pedagogy Help Sustain Scholars and Activists in the Ecozoic

The incorporation of ritual and contemplative practices, such as yoga, tai chi, chi gung, and meditation, into the planning process for the ESR program has allowed intuitive and spiritual insights to arise. Silent contemplation, allowing access to the "fertile void," is elevated in many spiritual traditions, as well as in Otto Scharmer's secular *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges* (2007). In the practice of Theory U, collaborators open their minds to release assumptions, open their hearts to sense new possibilities, and open their willingness to intuit yet-unrecognized possibilities. New insights emerge in quiet receptivity to be crystallized into new ideas that can be prototyped and iterated into new initiatives (Scharmer 2007). The efficacy of this practice commends it to any group or institution, including higher education, pursuing innovative evolution. Likewise, the thinking, feeling, and willing yogas of the Bhagavad Gita and the esoteric teachings of the anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner all assert that these three human faculties must be in alignment for effective, inspired, and sustained action (R. McDermott, pers. comm., Oct. 27, 2023, see also McDermott 2015).

As climate change and global ecological degradation demand new attitudes, practices, and ways of being to meet unprecedented challenges, contemplative practices can expand the mind to identify creative, novel possibilities. Amid increasingly destabilizing socio-ecological change, time-tested contemplative practices help maintain equanimity, clarity, and focus. Research suggests that deftly incorporated contemplative practices have the potential to make science and environmental studies classrooms more welcoming and inclusive for students from diverse backgrounds (Allison 2023; Bohorquez 2023).

Since Thomas Berry's time, pathways to the Ecozoic have become even more fraught and uncertain. As the Earth community traverses the knife's edge between the Ecozoic and the Anthropocene, generative practices of active hope and cultural reinvention serve as bulwarks against the ecocidal trajectory of business as usual. Drawing on a multiplicity of narratives, practices, and approaches, transdisciplinary scholars and practitioners of the multivalent fields of religion and ecology, religion and nature, and spiritual ecology call forth expansive visions of flourishing. These fields offer the interdisciplinary integument and topical expertise to make critical interventions toward intersectional, just, and vibrant futures for all life.

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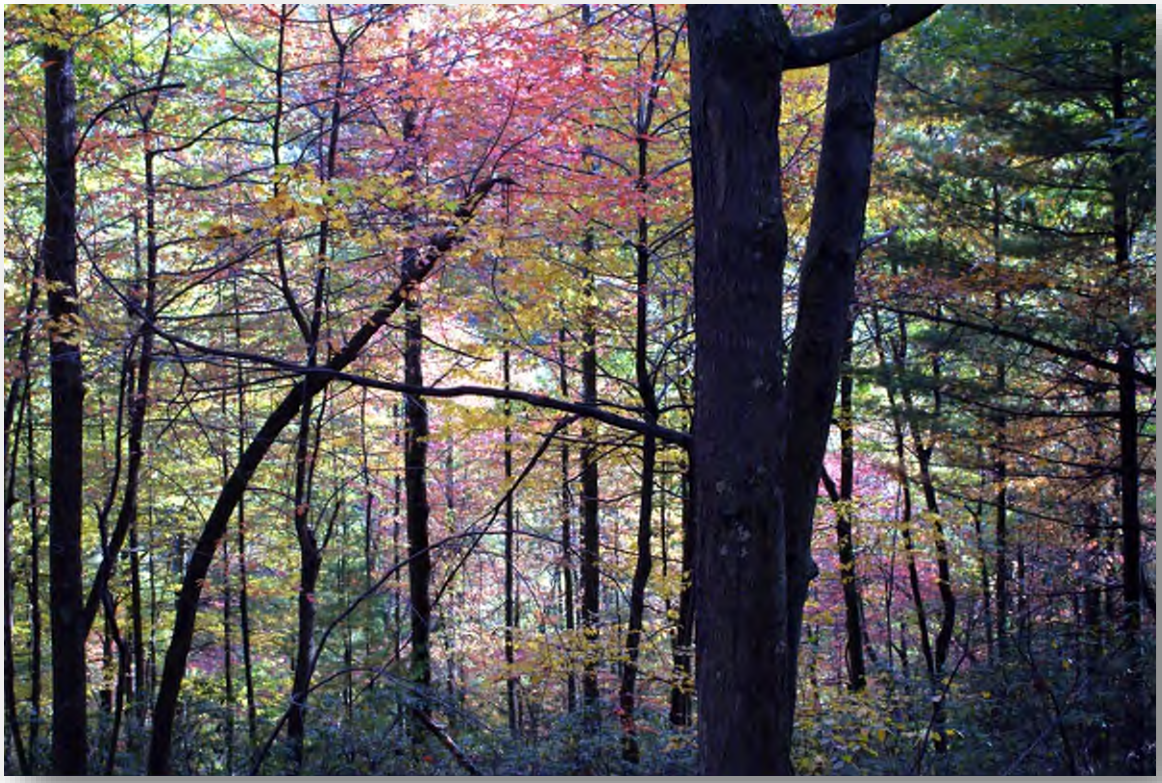
THE RHIZOMATIC FIELD OF RELIGION AND ECOLOGY/NATURE

Whitney A. Bauman



The emergence of a new field of study is anything but linear. This is certainly the case when it comes to the field now known as Religion and Ecology, or Religion and Nature. How one narrates that emergence matters. On the one hand, it seems silly to talk about the "start" of the relationship between religion and ecology because that relationship is as old as there have been some sort of creatures making meaning out of their lives in relationship to other life on the planet. My own definition of religion involves the process of meaning-making, or re-attuning to the bodies that make up the worlds around us, which all together make up the planetary community.[1] In this sense, religion is a part of our ecological contexts or a part of what some might call "nature naturing."[2] On the other hand, the study of "religion and ecology" or "religion and nature" does have a shorter history, and one that has branched out over the years as more and more scholars understand the importance of placing

[1] On religion as "re-attuning" see: Whitney Bauman, "Developing a Critical Planetary Romanticism: Re-attuning to the Earth" in *Religion, Materialism and Ecology*, ed. Peter M. Scott, Kate Rigby and Sigurd Bergmann (New York: Routledge, 2023), 13-28.

[2] This term is from the 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza.

all things human within the greater planetary community, and understand the increasing threats we all face due to climate change. Here I want to discuss at least four different branches, or more accurately nodes, of this rhizomatic field of study, not in any sort of super-secessionist way in which one directly evolves from and surpasses the other, but in a way that helps to identify some distinct, though overlapping, approaches.

Node 1: **Environmental History, Pantheisms, Panentheisms**

One "node" of the rhizomatic field is perhaps best captured by the famous "Lynn White critique" of the dominion clause in Christianity.[3] White, a philosopher of science and history, argued that the emerging environmental crisis was at heart a spiritual crisis that had to do with the way in which some humans, in this case largely Christians, understood themselves as having dominion over the rest of the natural world.[4] From this place of "human exceptionalism,"[5] humans understood themselves as above the rest of the natural world and thereby justified in using the rest of the natural world. He further argued that we needed a new understanding of the human that sees humans as part of the rest of nature, and he argued that St. Francis would be a good model. Many within what emerged as the field of religion and ecology have started with this critique, then have moved on to find more eco-friendly texts, rituals, traditions, and ideas within Christianity and later other world religions. Even prior to the White critique theologians such as Joseph Sittler and Paul Santmire were ahead of their times in declaring the importance of theology for environmental thinking.

Environmental history played a large role in this node of the field. Clarence Glacken's *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, one of the primary texts of environmental history provided one of the first comprehensive studies of how ideas about what it means to be human shape human-Earth interactions.[6] Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* combined such environmental history with feminist thought in an effort to show how patriarchal systems, such as those found in Greek thought and in Christianity, contributed to both the

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[3] For a critical discussion of the White hypothesis and its relationship to the field of religion and ecology, see: Anna Peterson and Todd LeVasseur, eds., *Religion and Ecological Crisis: The Lynn White Thesis at 50* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[4] Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," in *Science* 155: 3767 (1967): 1203-1207.

[5] On human exceptionalism, see: Anna Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment and our Place in the World* (Berkeley, CA: University of CA Press, 2001).

[6] Clarence Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of CA Press, 1976).

instrumentalization and degradation of women and of nature.[7] This work was then enmeshed in works by early eco-theologians such as Sallie McFague and Rosemary Radford Ruether. They also took into account goddess traditions and process philosophy to think differently about the Earth as God's body (McFague) and the need for both Gaia and God (Ruether).[8]

Node 2: World Religions and Ecology

Photo by Elisabeth Arnold on Unsplash

A second node of the field is the world religions and ecology approach that has roots in scholars such as Thomas Berry. Berry, influenced by the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, really understood that humans are beings of the 14-billion-year process of cosmic expansion and the 4.5-billion-year process of geo-

[7] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1980).

[8] Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

evolution.[9] As such, religions are of and for this Earth. Many of his students would go on to be leaders of the emerging field of religion and ecology. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim organized the conferences and volumes within religion and ecology that would become a touchstone for this field in the 1990s, and they founded the ongoing Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology.[10] There was also the creation of a Religion and Ecology group at the American Academy of Religion 1976. The first year was organized by process-influenced theologian Schubert Ogden and according to the minutes from the Program Committee, the group was authorized to invite Barry Commoner as a keynote speaker that year.[11] The central point of this node of the rhizome is to ask how religions might enter their "ecological phase."[12] This comparative and pluralistic approach helped bring many other traditions, cultures, and people into the field of religion and ecology: including the important conversations that were happening at the intersection of religion and ecology, liberation theology, and Indigenous studies.

Node 3: Nature Religions / Religious Naturalisms

Yet another node of the field has to do more squarely with nature religions and emerging religious practices that are nature-centered. Again, influenced by narratives of big science such as ecology and cosmology, some "religious naturalists" argue that the natural sciences provide us with the only sources we need to make meaning out of our lives. This would include the *Story of the Universe* by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, and also Ursula Goodenough's *Sacred Depths of Nature*.[13] It also includes concepts like the "Gaia hypothesis" by Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock, and "biophilia" by E. O. Wilson.[14] Wendell Berry's spiritual agrarianism would also fit within this node.[15] More recently

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[9] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008 edition; originally published in 1955).

[10] For information on the Harvard Religions of the World and Ecology book series, and the vast and tremendous work of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, visit: https://fore.yale.edu/.

[11] I am not sure whether Commoner attended, but this comes from the archives of the American Academy of Religion: RG 57 Box 32: American Academy of Religion Groups and Seminars 1976-1982.

[12] Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter their Ecological Phase* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2003).

[13] Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1994); Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature: How Life has Emerged and Evolved,* 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

[14] James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); E.O. Wilson, *Biophilia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

[15] Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 1977).

understandings of environmentalism or veganism as a spirituality, and hiking, surfing, and fishing as spiritual practices have been explored by various scholars. Many of these scholars within this node draw from the work of Bron Taylor on "dark green religion," and participate in the meetings of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture.[16]

Node 4: Critical Theories and Environmental Humanities

One other important node of the field has to do with the intersection of critical theories, religion, and the environment. Feminisms, Queer Theories, Decolonial and Postcolonial Theories, Disability Studies, and Animal Studies have all contributed to this node. The idea is that different bodies experience the worlds in which we live differently. Bodies, as Judith Butler argues, matter.[17] There is no one experience of nature, and who and what receives the brunt of ecological degradation (including climate change) is not equally distributed among living beings on the planet. Some bodies can be more "remote" from the costs of consumption, while others carry disproportionate environmental burdens.[18]

Still others within this node have found good conversation partners with theories such as the new materialisms, object-oriented ontology, affect theory, neo-animisms, and other more recent theories that understand all reality on an "immanent plane."[19] The idea is that if the modern Western world has separated humans from nature (and the humanities from the natural sciences), and this is part of the source of our ecological and social ills, then we need to rethink all things human back into the evolving planetary community.

Each of the Nodes Is Important

Though these are different nodes of a rhizome, they are not mutually exclusive, and they feed into one another. Most people in the field draw from each of these nodes at different times. In the future I suspect the methods and

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[16] Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature, Spirituality, and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009). The ISSRNC website can be found here: https://www.issrnc.org/.

[17] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

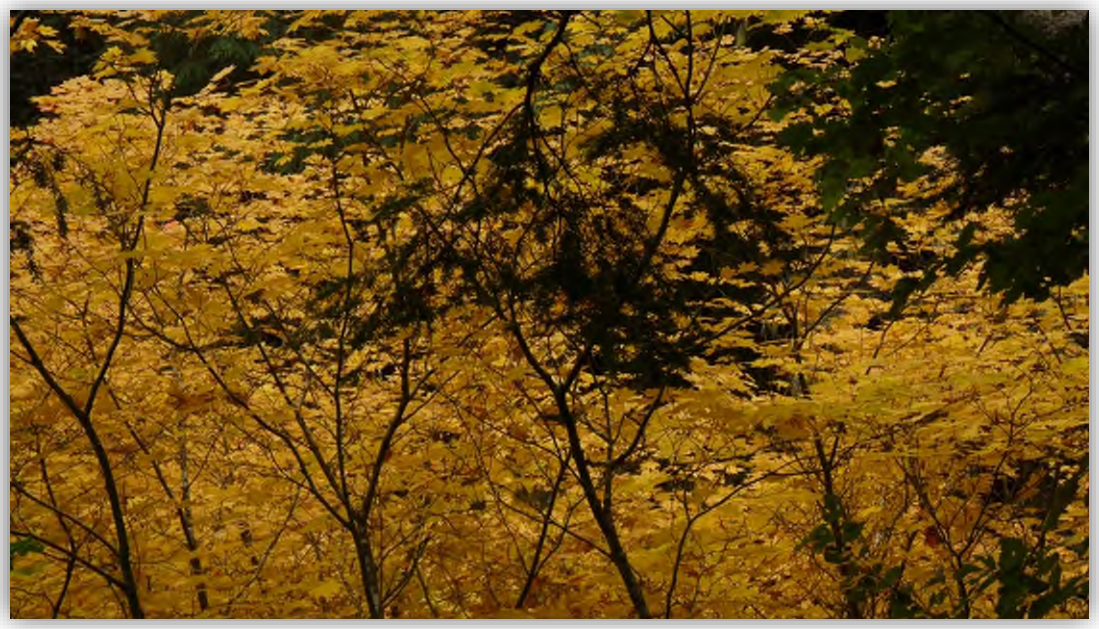
[18] On ecological "remoteness" and "backgrounding," see Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[19] Two recent volumes deal with these themes: Karen Bray, Heather Eaton, and Whitney Bauman, eds., *Earthly Things: Immanence, New Materialisms, and Planetary Thinking* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2023); and Peter M. Scott, Kate Rigby, and Sigurd Bergmann, eds., *Religion, Materialism and Ecology* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

sources of each node will be important for developing more planetary understandings of what it means to be human. The environmental humanities are just beginning to realize that religion and ecology/nature are important conversation partners. I think the future of the field (and even the study of religion in general) lies within emerging discourses that un-discipline our fragmented ways of thinking about humans and the Earth and thereby begin to develop something like planetary discourses.

THE EVOLUTION AND FUTURE OF RELIGION AND ECOLOGY: INSIGHTS FROM MUSLIM ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHT

İbrahim Özdemir



Introduction

Environmental degradation and climate change highlight the unsustainability of modern practices, necessitating a reevaluation of our interaction with nature. Roger Gottlieb rightly argues that the environmental crisis challenges our fundamental beliefs about humanity and our way of life (Gottlieb 2006, 4). This crisis has driven a shift towards holistic ethical frameworks that emphasize interconnectedness and the moral imperative to protect our planet. Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the environmental crisis has served as a clarion call for a fundamental transformation in our values and ethics vis-à-vis the natural world.

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim significantly advanced the field of religion and ecology by highlighting scholarly developments and the increasing involvement of religious leaders in environmental issues. Their pivotal role in organizing a seminal series of ten edited volumes, derived from groundbreaking conferences on "Religions of the World and Ecology" at Harvard (1996-1998), explored the ethical and spiritual resources within religious traditions for fostering sustainability. Their research illustrated how religious teachings and practices often emphasize stewardship of nature, although misinterpretations have occasionally led to environmental degradation. Their work continues to inspire the dialogue between religion and ecology and has profoundly impacted

Islamic environmentalism since I first encountered them at the 1998 “Islam and Ecology” conference. These conferences explored how the wisdom embedded in various religious and Indigenous cultures could contribute to a more profound understanding of our relationship with the cosmos. By bringing together scholars, theologians, and environmentalists, the conferences aimed to uncover the ethical and spiritual resources within religious traditions that could inspire more sustainable and respectful ways of living on our planet (Grim and Tucker 2014).

Eco-Theology as a Response to Environmental Challenges

Eco-theology and cosmoethics have emerged as fields that integrate cosmological principles with ethical responsibilities, emphasizing harmony with the universe. These interdisciplinary frameworks highlight the moral duties of humans within the cosmos, combining insights from cosmology and ethics (Salgues 2016). Islamic eco-theologians utilize Islamic principles to address ecological problems, promoting sustainable living as an essential aspect of faith. By drawing on approximately 750 Qur'anic verses related to the natural world and the Prophet's teachings on conservation and balance (al-Mīzan), Islamic eco-theology seeks to harmonize spiritual devotion with ecological consciousness based on Tawḥīd (oneness of God). This approach views environmental stewardship as a divine mandate, fostering a just interaction with the cosmos reflecting compassion, responsibility, and reverence for all of God's creation. Integrating spiritual and moral perspectives with environmental ethics, this framework addresses the ecological crisis comprehensively, urging a re-examination of our beliefs and advocating for sustainable coexistence within a balanced cosmos (al-Mīzan).

Muslim Environmental Thought

The Qur'anic View of the Universe: Order, Purpose, and Reflection

The Qur’an profoundly transformed the early Muslims’ worldview and their approach to life, replacing the pre-Islamic perception of nature as “chaotic, meaningless, and purposeless” and the consequent belief that human life is similarly devoid of meaning. The Qur’an gradually replaced this perception with the perception that the universe is a creation imbued with signs (*āyāt*) of God’s presence and wisdom, encouraging believers to reflect deeply on all existence with a holistic and inclusive perspective. This transformation underscores that human life must be meaningful and purposeful if nature possesses meaning and

purpose (Özdemir 2003). The Qur'anic vision fosters a profound sense of gratitude, responsibility, and reverence for the Creator, reinforcing the central concept of Islam that everything in the universe is a manifestation of God's meticulous design and purposeful creation. By viewing the natural world as a testament to divine wisdom, early Muslims were encouraged to engage with their environment in ways that honored and preserved its sanctity. The Prophet Muhammad pioneered in forbidding the felling of any tree in the wilderness that provides valuable shade or sustenance, either for people or animals, and declared, "*If anyone plants a tree, no human, nor any of God's creatures will eat from it, without its being reckoned as charity from him*" (Khalid et al. 2024, 28). When he emigrated to Al-Madinah, he established a sacred sanctuary encompassing that oasis city and its date palm groves, wherein the native vegetation would not be cut and wherein wild animals would not be hunted or disturbed, and surrounding that zone, a wider protected area (*himā*), in which wild trees and shrubs would not be felled. This understanding nurtured an ethic of stewardship and care in which the well-being of all creation was paramount. The Qur'anic emphasis on the interconnectedness of life and the universe continues to inspire a deep respect for the environment and a commitment to sustainable and ethical living, reflecting the timeless wisdom of Islamic teachings (Özdemir 2022, 64).

Image by Syauqi Fillah from Pixabay

Moreover, the Qur'anic perspective on the universe as the total of "everything other than God" (*mā siwā Allāh*) suggests a God-centric cosmos where all creation is intrinsically linked to the divine (Bakar 2018). This perspective underscores the interconnectedness of all entities within the universe, establishing a foundation for understanding the cosmos not just as a physical space but as a manifestation of divine will and order. This inherent connection between the universe and God highlights the metaphysical relationships central to Islamic cosmology. Such a new perspective profoundly shifted Muslims' ways of being, doing, thinking, and feeling in several significant ways:

1. Muslims were urged to recognize the divine in every aspect of life, fostering a holistic understanding of existence that integrated the sacred with the mundane. This spiritual awareness permeated daily activities, encouraging believers to see the presence of God in all creation (Q. 41:53).
2. The emphasis on justice, compassion, and moral integrity reshaped how Muslims approached their daily actions. It promoted ethical behavior in personal and communal affairs, highlighting the importance of honesty, charity, and social responsibility (Q. 2:177).
3. By presenting the universe as a sign of God's presence and wisdom (30:17-21), the Qur'an encouraged Muslims to reflect deeply on existence. This reflection nurtured a sense of gratitude and responsibility, reinforcing the belief that everything in the universe is a manifestation of God's meticulous design and purposeful creation.
4. Nature's interconnectedness and divine purpose of creation inspired an ethic of stewardship and care for the environment. Muslims were encouraged to view the natural world as a trust bestowed by God to be protected and preserved for future generations (*Amanah*).

By adopting this comprehensive perspective, Muslims could integrate their spiritual beliefs with their everyday lives, promoting a sense of purpose, ethical conduct, and commitment to environmental stewardship. This transformative perspective instilled a comprehensive ethical framework that guided Muslims in all aspects of life, fostering a community grounded in spiritual awareness, justice, compassion, and respect for the natural world (Acıkgenc 2014; Draz 2008).

Moreover, the Qur'an teaches a fundamental principle regarding the universe: "*Everything has been created with a specific order, duty, meaning, and purpose*" by God (Qur'an 38:27; 3:190–191; 21:16–17; 23:115). This concept is central to the Islamic worldview. It underscores the importance of reflection and contemplation (*tafakkur* and *tadabbur*) over the creation, the signs of God, and the resulting cosmoethical awareness. According to the Qur'an, every element of

the universe is meticulously designed with a specific purpose and duty by the Creator. Deep reflection and contemplation on the creation and signs of God, both in the furthest horizons and within oneself, are considered acts of worship (Q. 41:53).

The Qur'an frequently reminds believers of God's blessings, emphasizing that God is the sole creator and sustainer of all life (Q. 35:3). The abundance of blessings and sustenance on Earth and in the skies serve as constant reminders of God's generosity and care, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the cosmos as a divine order. This perspective promotes stewardship and accountability, urging humanity to act with compassion and justice towards all beings and the environment. Embracing this ethical framework, we are reminded of our duty to preserve the cosmos' intricate balance and recognize the profound interconnectedness of all life. It calls for stewardship that honors this divine interconnectedness, encouraging sustainable practices, conservation efforts, and a reverence towards nature, aligning human actions with divine purpose.

The moral implications of the Qur'anic worldview are significant, calling for a deep sense of care and responsibility towards all life forms. The Qur'an repeatedly invites reflection on God's signs in nature, fostering compassion and empathy, where the well-being of animals, plants, and the environment is integral to humanity's well-being. Respect for creation is another cornerstone, urging humans to treat nature with dignity and reverence, translating into sustainable practices that honor the natural world's balance and harmony. Rather than exploiting resources for short-term gain, the Qur'anic approach promotes responsible and equitable use of nature's bounty, ensuring that future generations inherit a healthy planet. Moreover, sustainability is a moral imperative, highlighted by teachings on moderation and avoiding wastefulness, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad's guidance on water usage. The Qur'anic worldview champions care, compassion, respect, and sustainability, fostering a just and harmonious relationship with the natural world, reflecting divine order and wisdom.

Manifestations of this worldview are evident throughout Islamic civilization, from Andalusia to India. In Andalusia, the integration of architecture, agriculture, and urban planning with the natural environment demonstrate respect for ecological balance. Gardens like those in the Alhambra symbolize Islamic stewardship and sustainability. Similarly, the Mughal Empire's architectural marvels in India, such as the Taj Mahal, reflect Qur'anic principles of beauty, harmony, and respect for nature, designed with sensitivity to the natural environment and emphasizing the interconnectedness of human creations and the natural world. These historical examples highlight how the Qur'anic ethical framework has been applied in diverse cultural contexts, promoting an enduring legacy of care, compassion, and sustainable living.

Drawing inspiration from these past achievements, contemporary societies can reinvigorate their commitment to these timeless principles, ensuring a future where the well-being of all creation is upheld.

Key Concepts of Islamic Environmentalism

Japanese scholar Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993) dedicated his life to studying the Qur'an and its hermeneutics. In his seminal work, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, he examined the Islamic moral code and the ethical relationship between humans and God. Izutsu argues that the Qur'an portrays God as embodying ethics, requiring individuals to live ethically as a form of devotion. He highlights that ethics and religion are intertwined in the Qur'an, using ethnolinguistics to explore key concepts and the interplay between language and culture (Izutsu 2002).

The authors of *Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth,* in the same spirit, redefined key terms of Islamic environmentalism based on the Qur'anic worldview and Sunnah of The Prophet to reflect its core message and special needs. These key concepts collectively form a comprehensive ethical framework that promotes care, compassion, respect, and sustainability in human interaction with the natural environment. Major concepts are summarized here as they are expected to shape the development of Islamic environmental discourse in the future.

Tawhīd: Tawhīd affirms God's oneness and signifies oneness, unity, uniqueness, singularity, matchlessness, and incomparability. Tawhīd is the bedrock of the Islamic ethos. Muslims hold that the oneness of God is the basis of our faith, metaphysics, ethics, law, and spirituality. God—be He glorified and exalted—has not made any of His creatures worthless: The very fact that He has created a being gives it inherent worth and value. The most essential ethical implication of God's oneness is to serve the one God—the Lord of all beings—by doing the greatest good we can to all His creatures. Suppose we recognize God as the one and only Lord of every created being. In that case, we must know that devotion to Him requires utmost goodness toward His entire creation—and that we must treat every creature with *taqwā*, or reverence toward its Creator. All created beings have inherent worth and value because God has been creating them. To exclude any created being from moral consideration violates the principle of tawhīd. Indeed, to make our ultimate aim less than the good of all beings is unethical and immoral: it violates the principal ethical demand of tawhīd (Khalid et al. 2024).

Āyah / āyāt: The word "āyah," plural "āyāt," means a sign, a wonder, a marvel, a masterpiece, or a miracle. In Islamic teaching, each created being is a wondrous sign that points beyond itself to its Maker, His wisdom, and His mercy;

each is a portent filled with meaning and lessons to be learned. The same word "āyah" is also used for the Qur'an verses. Muslim scholars have stressed the parallels between the revelations of the written texts revealed to humankind through the prophets, the messengers of God, and God's revelations in the world of nature. Each is a revelation composed of signs, āyāt, coming from the same source. The signs of the divine clarify the meanings of those in the texts, and the written texts guide us in understanding the signs of creation. Therefore, every element of the natural world holds intrinsic value, reflecting divine attributes and fulfilling a purpose within the creation's grand design (ibid).

Mizan: The Qur'an emphasizes the concept of al-Mizan, or cosmic balance, as a fundamental principle created and sustained by God. In the Qur'anic context, it signifies *weighing, balance, equilibrium, proportion, harmony, reciprocity, equity, fairness, and justice*. The Qur'an describes a cosmic equilibrium (Al-Mīzān) in which all interconnected and interdependent beings are integrated in harmony (15:19-20, 55:7-10). This concept is crucial for understanding the ecological equilibrium and ethical conduct associated with resource consumption. The Qur'an highlights the intricate balance within creation, urging humans to avoid corruption and excess (fasad) that disrupt this equilibrium. Believers are called to reflect on this harmony as a sign of God's wisdom. "And the heaven He raised and imposed the balance. That you do not transgress within the balance. And establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance" (55:7-9). These verses draw attention to the precision and equilibrium in the universe, urging humans to maintain this balance in their lives (ibid).

Khalīfah fī 'l-ard: In Qur'anic teaching, the concept of khalīfah fī 'l-ard—stewardship on Earth—is central to understanding humanity's role and responsibility. The term *khalīfah* derives from the root *kh–l–f***,** meaning to succeed, follow, or act on behalf of another. This ethical mandate, assigned by the All-Merciful Lord, emphasizes the responsibility and accountability of human beings on Earth (Qur'an 2:30, 6:133, 7:129, 11:57, 24:55). Khalīfah implies a relationship with the Earth, inherited by successive individuals and generations. It is a test from the Lord to examine human actions, requiring knowledge of right and wrong and empowerment to influence creation for good or ill. The highest degrees of empowerment involve judging justly rather than ruling over the Earth. Therefore, the notion of a khalīfah as God's viceroy with dominion over the Earth is misinterpreted. The terms "steward" and "stewardship" better capture the responsibility inherent in khalīfah, though khalīfah also involves minimizing interference in the natural processes by which God has set the Earth aright (ibid).

Humans, as stewards (khalīfah) of the Earth, are responsible for caring for and managing the environment. This stewardship implies sustainable use of resources, protection of ecosystems, and ethical treatment of all living beings, reflecting a profound sense of duty towards maintaining the balance of nature.

This stewardship is not merely a position of dominance but a trust (Amanah) that requires humans to respect, protect, and nurture the environment (Q. 33:72).

Prohibition of Isrāf: Islam strongly prohibits wastefulness (isrāf) and extravagance, advocating for the sustainable use of resources (Q. 7:31). Knowledge about the consequences of wasteful consumption and its impact on the environment helps Muslims adhere to the Qur'anic prohibition against wastefulness. Understanding the ecological impact of waste promotes more mindful and sustainable consumption practices. Informed consumption involves considering the ethical implications of products and services, including their environmental footprint and the conditions under which they were produced. This knowledge helps Muslims make choices that reflect their values and commitment to social and environmental justice. The Qur'an's moral teachings guide believers to avoid corruption (fāsād) and wastefulness (isrāf), instead promoting actions that sustain and enhance the natural world. From an eco-theological perspective, this elevated consciousness creates a harmonious existence where spiritual fulfillment and environmental stewardship are deeply intertwined. It calls for a reverence of nature as part of one's devotion to Allah and a commitment to ethical conduct that ensures the well-being of all creation (ibid).

Concrete examples of eco-theology and cosmology can be seen in Islamic classical literature. In seeking a deeper understanding and a different orientation to life, the Sufi legacy persuades us that the experience of a cosmic connection can help us overcome the disenchantment of nature in modern times and grow toward a new meaning of life. This Sufi perspective encourages a profound appreciation of the interconnectedness of all life, fostering a sense of stewardship and responsibility towards the environment. By immersion in this spiritual heritage, one can find inspiration to adopt sustainable practices and nurture a deeper, more harmonious relationship with nature.

Some Historical Examples of Islamic Environmentalism

The case of the Sufi Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 875) illustrates the profound ethical consciousness and compassion central to the Qur'anic ethos. His story exemplifies the ethics of reflection on cosmic, multidimensional morality and our responsibilities toward the cosmos. Bāyazīd demonstrated deep spiritual awareness and ecological sensitivity, highlighting the intimate connection between creation and divine purpose.

One day, Bāyazīd bought cardamom seeds in Hamadhān and inadvertently brought several ants back to Bisṭām. Realizing his mistake, he compassionately journeyed 450 miles back to return the ants to their home. This act reflects his profound ethical responsibility toward all life forms, emphasizing the

interconnectedness of all beings. Bāyazīd's actions, rooted in Sufi tradition, underscore the unity and interconnectedness of creation. Sufism teaches that every element of the universe is a manifestation of divine presence, deserving of love and respect. By embodying these principles, Bāyazīd demonstrated a holistic approach to ethics. His journey to return the ants highlights the importance of ethical duties beyond the human realm, fostering a sense of responsibility and compassion essential for maintaining cosmic balance. Bāyazīd's story, therefore, serves as a powerful reminder of the ethical and spiritual principles of cosmoethics, encouraging us to adopt a more inclusive and compassionate approach to our responsibilities, deepening our connection with the cosmos and all its inhabitants (Nicholson 1914, p. 108).

Al-Nabulsi and the Book of Universe

Abd al-Ghanī ibn Ismā'īl al-Nābulusī (1641-1731) was a distinguished Sunni Muslim scholar, poet, and author on Sufism, ethnography, and agriculture. His poetic invitation, "*Reflect upon the lines of the [Book of the] Universe, for they are letters to you from the highest realm*," encapsulates Islamic cosmoethics (Nursi 2007, pp. 368–369). This perspective encourages viewing the universe as a divinely authored text, revealing spiritual truths and ethical guidance. Al-Nābulusī's metaphor aligns with key principles of Islamic eco-theology: a) Every element of creation is a sign (ā'y ā't) from God, urging believers to recognize the divine in nature; b) the reference to creation's balance reflects God's wisdom and justice, promoting harmony in environmental interactions; c) contemplating the universe's "lines" fosters awareness of one's duties as a steward (khalīfah) of the Earth; d) every aspect of creation holds significance, countering the notion of nature as mere resource and highlighting its divine worth; e) the metaphor underscores the unity (Tāwhid) of all creation, advocating for an integrated approach to environmental stewardship.

This Islamic worldview was vibrant and influential as late as the 19th century, as evidenced by the accounts of Western travelers in Muslim countries, who remarked on the profound sense of interconnectedness, balance, and spirituality in Islamic societies. They noted the deep respect for nature, the emphasis on community welfare, and the pervasive influence of Islamic principles on daily life. This enduring presence of the Islamic worldview highlights its resilience and continued relevance even in the face of modernization and external influences.

Lamartine's Observations

The famous French poet and statesman Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) made insightful observations about Muslims' compassionate and respectful

relationship with all animate and inanimate creatures. During his extensive journey and stay in Ottoman lands, he noted: “Muslims extend their compassion and kindness to trees, birds, dogs, and all the species of wretched animals that are often abandoned or ill-treated in other societies. This behavior is deeply rooted in the principles of the Qur’anic worldview, which can be understood as the cosmic moral code that defines our relationship with the rest of creation” (Lamartine 1850, p. I, 160).

Lamartine's observations underscore a deep-rooted ethic in Muslim culture that values and protects all life forms, fostering harmonious coexistence with nature. This respect for creation reflects Islamic principles of mercy, stewardship, and interconnectedness. Practices such as leaving water for district dogs and establishing foundations to feed one’s pigeons after one's death exemplify this respect and compassion. By meeting the basic needs of animals, Muslims embody the cosmic moral code in daily life, maintaining balance and harmony in the cosmos. Lamartine’s insights vividly illustrate the compassion extended to all creatures by Muslims. This ethical framework, transcending social and cultural boundaries, emphasizes that such compassion is a moral imperative. It highlights a profound understanding that all life forms deserve dignity and care, embodying a universal principle of kindness and stewardship.

Contemporary Muslim Scholarship on Environmental Awareness

Since the late 1960s, Muslim scholars and environmental experts have been contributing to the religiously inspired calls for “global action on climate change,” fostering the development of Islamic eco-theology. These scholars have engaged in various environmental projects, making theological formulations relevant to contemporary ecological issues and creating a sense of interconnectedness between humanity and the surrounding ecosystem.

The contributions of contemporary scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Fazlun Khalid, Ibrahim Özdemir, Othman Llewellyn, Mawil Y. Izzi Dien, Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, Aishah Ali Abdallah, Sarra Tlili, Tarik M. Quadir, Anna Gade, MD Abu Sayem, Odeh Al-Jayoussi, and Fachruddin Mangunjaya have been pivotal in reviving and articulating Islamic environmental ethics. Their work has played a crucial role in awakening Islamic environmentalism and promoting sustainable practices within the framework of Islamic teachings.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, often regarded as a trailblazer in Islamic environmental thought, authored the seminal work, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, in 1968. Offering insights into the interconnection between humanity and the natural world, this book is essential reading for Muslims concerned about the environmental challenges of our time, especially with its

particular Sufi dimension. Nasr's work emphasizes the spiritual dimensions of environmental stewardship, highlighting the profound connection between faith and care for our planet. Nasr argues that the environmental crisis is fundamentally a crisis of values and that a spiritual reawakening is necessary to address it. Nasr advocates for a worldview that sees nature as sacred and humans as stewards entrusted with its care. His writings have highlighted the need for a metaphysical foundation for environmental ethics.

The growing interest in how Islamic teachings intersect with environmental stewardship has led to the publication of several crucial books that delve into this critical relationship. These works explore the ethical, theological, and practical dimensions of environmentalism in Islam and offer guidance for Muslims seeking to align their faith with eco-conscious actions.

"The Muslim Declaration on Nature," written by Dr. Abdullah Omar Naseef for the 1986 Assisi meeting organized by WWF-International and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, emphasizes that the universe is God's creation, with mankind as His vicegerent (khalīfah) tasked with stewardship. It highlights the fundamental Islamic concepts of Tawhid (Unity of God), Khalīfah (trusteeship), and Akhirah (accountability). These principles, Naseef argues, underscore the interconnectedness of all creation and the ethical responsibility to maintain ecological balance and harmony. The declaration calls for Muslims to integrate these values into all aspects of life, including environmental legislation, to foster a sustainable and compassionate relationship with the natural world. This holistic approach, rooted in Islamic teachings and Shari'ah law, provides practical guidance for protecting nature and addressing modern issues like nuclear power and biotechnology, ensuring that actions align with divine ethical boundaries (Naseef 1986).

However, one of the foundational texts in this field emerged a decade later: *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust,* edited by Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Foltz et al. 2003). This anthology offers a comprehensive overview of Islamic environmental ethics, exploring the ethical, theological, and practical dimensions of environmentalism in Islam. For sustainable Muslims it is essential reading to understand their religious responsibilities towards the environment.

Fazlun Khalid's work, on the other hand, promotes practical and theological approaches to ecological issues, blending traditional Islamic teachings with contemporary environmental science. Khalid's *Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity, and the Climate Crisis* investigates the intersection of Islam, modernity, and climate change. By offering insights into addressing environmental challenges through Islamic principles, Khalid's book is also essential reading for Muslims concerned about the planet's future (Khalid 2019).

Ibrahim Abdul-Matin's *Green Deen: What Islam Teaches about Protecting the Planet* provides practical advice for Muslims on how to contribute to sustainability efforts. By exploring Islamic teachings on environmental protection, Abdul-Matin's book is a valuable resource for those seeking to integrate their faith with eco-conscious actions (Abdul-Matin 2010). Sarra Tlili's *Animals in the Qur'an* examines animals' roles and symbolic significance within Islamic teachings and ethics. This comprehensive exploration of the Qur'anic depiction of animals helps Muslims deepen their understanding of the sanctity of all creation (Tlili 2012).

Anna M. Gade's *Muslim Environmentalism: Religious and Social Foundations* explores how Muslims engage with environmental issues. Highlighting Islamic environmentalism's religious and social roots, Gade's book offers valuable insights for those interested in the intersection of faith and ecology (Gade, 2019). Mawil Y. Izzi Dien explores the environmental teachings embedded within Islam in *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam* (Dien 2000). This book reveals the ecological wisdom of Islamic tradition, making it a valuable resource for Muslims seeking to deepen their eco-spirituality. Lastly, Ibrahim Özdemir's *Care for Creation: An Islamic Perspective* emphasizes the importance of caring for the Earth from an Islamic perspective. It guides sustainable Muslims striving to fulfill their religious obligations towards creation.

These books and the growing literature on Islam and the environment collectively provide a robust foundation for understanding the intricate bond between humans and nature within the Islamic tradition. They emphasize the spiritual dimensions of environmental stewardship and offer practical advice for integrating faith with eco-conscious actions, underscoring the importance of a harmonious coexistence with the natural world.

Two additional texts by Muslim environmentalists provide an overview of extensive consultations and debates. First, *The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change*, launched in August 2015 at an International Islamic Climate Change Symposium in Istanbul, is a collective call from the Islamic faith to address climate change. Initiated by a diverse symposium of academics, religious authorities, inter-governmental organizations, and civil society representatives, the declaration emphasizes the environmental ethics of Islam and calls for rejecting human greed, respecting nature's equilibrium, and recognizing the moral obligation to conserve.

Second, *Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth* is a global endeavor to engage Islamic scholars and Muslim institutions in developing and adopting an Islamic outlook on the environment. It is a restatement of the principles governing the protection of nature in a form that meets current challenges. The initiative seeks to bridge the divide between religiosity and sustainability, providing guidance on the ways Muslims can reignite environmental activism from the Islamic tradition.

Conclusion and a Vision for a Sustainable Future

Although modern Islamic environmental thought and activism began with Nasr's works in the 1960s, *Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth* (noted above) represents the culmination of Muslim environmental efforts. This covenant embodies the essence of Islamic environmentalism, integrating centuries of wisdom with contemporary insights. It is a testament to our enduring commitment to the Earth, reflecting a legacy of stewardship and serving as a beacon of hope for future generations. As we navigate the relationship between faith and ecology, *Al-Mizan* offers a path toward harmonious coexistence, inspiring renewed dedication to the sacred balance of our natural world. Contemporary Muslim scholars have provided a robust framework for addressing today's environmental challenges by grounding ecological responsibility in spiritual and ethical principles. Their work highlights the potential of religious teachings to inspire sustained and meaningful action towards a just and sustainable world.

Al-Mizan outlines a comprehensive framework for Muslim policymakers and NGOs, integrating Islamic principles with environmental stewardship. It advocates for a holistic approach to sustainability, emphasizing that the well-being of our planet and future generations relies on immediate and concerted efforts. Integrating *Al-Mizan's* principles into educational curricula is essential for fostering a generation committed to environmental sustainability. By embedding these core messages in our educational systems, we can nurture values of moderation, balance (mīzān), and stewardship (khalīfah) in young minds. These values translate into practical actions, such as reducing waste, conserving resources, and promoting sustainable community practices.

Policymakers play a pivotal role in embedding *Al-Mizan's* principles within national and international environmental frameworks. This shift requires moving from traditional, unsustainable economic models to sustainable, circular systems based on the *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa* (goals or objectives of sharia). Implementing *Al-Mizan* can yield significant long-term benefits–mitigating climate change, preserving biodiversity, and ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources. This vision promises a healthier, more equitable, and resilient world for us and future generations. The future of a better and healthier world hinges on realizing the findings of *Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth*. By aligning our educational and policy frameworks with its core messages, we can nurture a generation dedicated to environmental stewardship and sustainable living, securing a brighter future for all.

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CULTIVATING PLACEFULNESS: DEEPENING OUR ROOTS FOR TROUBLED TIMES

Jason Brown

I first put the words religion and ecology together while I was pacing the stacks in the basement of the Brigham Young University library. I came across the Harvard University edited volumes on Religions of the World and Ecology (1996-1998). As an anthropology major, I was interested in how culture shaped ecologies, and as I struggled to craft my own ecological spirituality out of obstinate stone of my Mormon religious upbringing, these two words lit a fire in my life.

I went on to earn master's degrees in forestry and theology from Yale and worked directly with Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, the conveners of the conference series that led to the volumes. During a forestry field trip to Europe in 2011, I stood slack-jawed in a Slovenian forest attached to a Carthusian monastery. This experience planted the seed of my PhD dissertation, and at the beginning of 2024, I published my book *Dwelling in the Wilderness: Modern Monks in the American West*.

The book outlines what I learned about sense of place from monks at four monastic communities in the American West. Monks take a vow of stability, a vow that weds them to place and to the monastic community. Early Cistercian Abbot Stephen Harding (1050-1134) saw this vow meaning that his fellow monks

should become "lovers of the place."[1] As I found, many monks have deep affection and commitment to care for their monastery landscapes.

European-descended peoples in North America, like me, tend to live with a wounded sense of place. It has been re-placed by mobility, commodity, and sentimentality. As philosopher Vince Vycinas once wrote, "[W]e are homeless even if we have a place to live."[2] In the West, consumerism is as much driven by manufactured needs as it is by a longing to belong. One of the insights of the field of religion and ecology has been that the Anthropocene, the metaphorical epoch of industrial human pervasiveness, is as much a crisis of meaning as it is a crisis of ecology and extinction.

It is a common refrain in the field of religion and ecology that we will not work to protect what we do not love. The contemplative and spiritual ecologies that have emerged from this field have put a strong emphasis on the *sacredness* of the world. But as we know, the ecological crisis is going to impact *particular* places differently. To deepen our relationship with our places, their histories and communities, is therefore a tactic for protecting them from harm.

With the dawning of this inhumane age, I believe cultivating a deeper sense of place might be a powerful practice for tending to our homeplaces while equipping us with the resilience to weather the coming storms. What I am calling "placefulness" encompasses a range of contemplative practices that witness, attend to, and reflect on what is and what is arising *in our places*, especially during troubled times.

Fullness

Readers are probably familiar with the term "mindfulness," the powerful practice of attention and presence derived from meditation practices developed by lineages of Buddhism. I understand mindfulness as emphasizing the cultivation of a deep awareness of what is arising out of one's mind and body at any given moment without judgement. On the path to Buddhist Enlightenment, mindfulness, or *Sati*, leads the practitioner to *samadhi*, a deeper penetration into the reality of impermanence.

Geologist Marcia Bjornerud's book *Timefulness* shows how deeply embedded we are in Earth's mindboggling deep time. She takes us on a tour of the 4.5-billion-year history of our Earth and shows that every place is an inheritor of this unfolding deep time. In our modern globalized world, history and time seem to vanish with the next great thing, and looking back is discouraged as a kind of

[1] Stephen Harding (12th Century) Exordium Parvum, Website: http://www.ocso.org/resources/foundational-text/exordium-parvum/

[2] Vincent Vycinas, *Earth and Gods*: *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (The Hague, Netherlands: Springer, 1969), 268.

quirk. But standing near the shore of Lake Winnebago, Wisconsin, during the annual spring sturgeon count, Bjornerud marvels at the joyful faces of many people who seem to have come out just to witness firsthand these ancient fossil-fish. As Bjornerud writes, "The past is not lost; in fact, it is palpably present in the rocks, landscapes, groundwater, glaciers, and ecosystems."[3] Aldo Leopold's dictum to "think like a mountain" includes not only the spatial dimension of relating to fellow creatures and their habitats, but also the seasons and changes that are so patiently endured.

Placefulness is deep attention to what arises from our places and is not simply a kind of romanticism of nature. We are embedded in the natural world, emerge from it, and should witness the changes we see occurring.

To Be Rooted

Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann sees place and landscape more generally as a core theme of the entire canon of Hebrew scripture. He writes, "In the [Bible] there is no timeless space, but there also is no spaceless time. There is rather storied place, that is, a place that has meaning because of the history lodged there."[4] The Peoples of the Levant were covenanted to the Divine through places: Jacob/Israel wrestled with an angelic person on the Jabok River, and the placename Penuel means Face of/facing God. Many passages in the Hebrew Bible begin or end with the name of a place, or the origin of that place's name. Stone altars, groves, and mountain peaks were places of contact with the Divine or the ancestors and their stories.

This biblical placefulness is not a necessarily akin to a contemporary nature spirituality, but a deeply sacred geography where a people's claim to the land was rooted in encounters with the Divine. Layered over this history is a tension between the motifs of the garden and wilderness, starting with the very first chapters of Genesis where Adam and Eve are exiled from Eden. The entire arc of the story of Israel might be said to involve God luring humanity back to the garden through covenant, obedience, and justice.

For this reason, mystic philosopher Simone Weil wrote. "To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul."[5] Rootedness was a central idea for Weil, whose life was cut short by her radical asceticism. Her emphasis on rootedness grew out of her conviction that humanity's increasing uprootedness was causing a troubling malaise among

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[3] Marcia Bjornerud, *Timefulness: How Thinking Like a Geologist Can Help Save the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 162.

[4] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land*: *Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), pos. 3051.

[5] Simon Weil, *The Need for Roots* (New York: Routledge, [1949] 2002), 41.

Western societies. This malaise has fueled our consumerist lifestyles which seek to fill a void left by our rootedness in communities and places. And the fossil fuels which power this consumer society are the driving force of ecological breakdown and the climate crisis. Returning to place might mean returning to our roots, in other words, recognizing that what is truly worthwhile is right in front of us most of the time.

Singing the Land into Being

Graham Crumb/Imagicity.com, CC BY 3.0, Wikimedia Commons

While humans are a peripatetic species, wandering on our two legs to almost every continent before the advent of farming, we also formed deep bonds with our regions, routes, and places. As David Abram writes, our symbolic consciousness, which enabled us to read the landscape as hunters and foragers, facilitated the development of language and writing. The first ideographic languages which used characters instead of syllabic symbols such as Chinese, drew heavily from the day-to-day life of living close to the land.[6] The personhoods of place nurtured the tender shoots of our humanity from our earliest moments of consciousness and are reflected in creation stories from around the world.

[6] David Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (New York: Vintage, 1996).

There are of course many examples from Indigenous peoples all over the world of deep inseparable relationships to place. I want to mention at least two. For people living with the lands of their ancestors, places are rich with personhood, memory, and story.

English travel writer Bruce Chatwin's book *The Songlines* explores aboriginal understandings of place in Australia (from his limited perspective). For Indigenous peoples of Australia, during the "Dreamtime" a primordial every-when, the Ancestors sang the world into being along trails called Songlines.

Within these cosmologies, one's Dreaming is the animal connected to the very first Ancestor whether it be Kangaroo, Lizard, Bandicoot, Honey Ant, or Badger. Most Dreamings are animals, a few are plants or trees. An initiated person receives a portion of a Songline that traverses the first track of their Dreaming. The tempo and melody of the Songline express the topography of the place. Forms of the land are a remnant of one's Dreaming's first movements, and the features and contours of every place reflect the stories from that sacred walked-on canon.

It is hard for me to imagine being so knit to a place, but for the oldest culture on the planet, there is a sense not that the land belongs to them, but as Bob Randall, a Yankunytjatjara elder often says, the people belong to the land. An awareness of the rhythms and beings of the place orients people toward a long view of history, ancestry, and deep belonging.

A Landscape that Teaches

Places can also be teachers. Many Indigenous place names in the American West are made with afforded features of the landscape: trees, mountains, valleys; or they speak of activities that take place there like harvesting, council, or hunting. For example, in Western Apache place names, Tséé Chiizh Dah Sidilé means Coarse-Textured Rocks Lie Above in a Compact Cluster. This is a descriptive name for the features of that place. However, these descriptive placenames are laden with stories and those stories have taught the Western Apache how to live for time immemorial.

The collective history of the Apache has accumulated in these places, and they speak their lessons to the people. In Keith Basso's account of these places in his amazing book *Wisdom Sits in Places*, his informant Ruth gets visibly uncomfortable as they pass a place in their car and she says, "I know that place, it stalks me every day." This is because at that place a story is told of a man who attempted to commit incest with his stepdaughter. In Ruth's case the place reminded her of an assault she suffered by someone close to her. The wrongness of the act is written in the landscape which gave her strength to seek justice. To

put a person in their place, so to speak, one need only recite a particular place's name, and its lessons will shoot like an arrow into the mind of the interlocutor.

Learning the Liturgy of Place

My own writing has been oriented toward a contemplative ecology that reflects on the entanglement between the inscape of soul and the landscape (Holyscapes). In my evolving practice, I want to immerse myself in the liturgy of place here at Vancouver, British Columbia. My walks attend to the cycles of the stars, sun, and moon. I am learning the rudiments of the astrological archetypes and Greek stories that accompany the constellations. I am attuning myself to the cycles and patterns of season and weather, the features of topography and surficial geology. I am slowly learning the Latin, common, and Indigenous names of plants, animals, and fungi. I am using an app to learn the melodies of the avian soundscape. I am noting the memories, lessons, experiences, symbols, and rituals that embed themselves in mundane places. I want to be a participant and not just an observer in the ongoingness of both time and place.

Restory-ing Place

In academia, we love coming up with new terms to describe our world. The sciences and social sciences have distinct vocabularies. Unfortunately, many words in the sciences and humanities are dissociative—they disconnect the speaker from the referent. Even words like environment, ecosystem, and ecology were coined by a culture without a home. They invoke abstract and universal spaces. I learned this caution from agrarian writer Wendell Berry who writes:

> No settled family or community has ever called its home place an "environment." None has ever called its feeling for its home place "biocentric" or "anthropocentric." None has ever thought of its connection to its home place as "ecological," deep or shallow. The concepts and insights of the ecologists are of great usefulness in our predicament, and we can hardly escape the need to speak of "ecology" and "ecosystems." But the terms themselves are culturally sterile. They come from the juiceless, abstract intellectuality of the universities which was invented to disconnect, displace, and disembody the mind. The real names of the environment are the names of rivers and river valleys; creeks, ridges, and

> mountains; towns and cities; lakes, woodlands, lanes, roads, creatures, and people.[7]

As a scholar and writer, I have a lot to learn from this caution. Placefulness embraces science, but also a deeply lived sense of home. It is not a replacement for developing intimate relationships to particular landscapes, but a description of a practice that does.

In cultivating a sense of place, we may be passionate about restoring ecologies that have been damaged by colonial and extractive, or perhaps just careless, practices. Ecological restoration benefits local biodiversity and ecosystem function, and it is a major part of the conservation movement's toolkit.

Yet, within some restoration paradigms, restoring an ecosystem means choosing a baseline that reflects an ecology before humans entered relationship with it. Or it might ignore Indigenous contributions to forming the ecosystem as keystone species in the first place. For many Indigenous restoration projects, ecologies are home-places, not pristine domains of Nature, and thus restoration almost always includes the people who depend on them.[8]

Thus, as a tool of placefulness, I think it is important to shift our understanding of restoration to one of re-story-ation, a repairing of our understanding of our place within a given ecology, rather than just an act of public penance before the God of Nature. Ecological re-story-ation could be a form of public ritual, which is how ecologist Stephanie Mills understands this important tool:

> [The act of restoration] gives [people] a basis for commitment to the ecosystem. It is very real. People often say we have to change the way everybody thinks. Well, my God, that's hard work! How do you do that? A very powerful way to do that is by engaging people in experiences. It's ritual we're talking about. Restoration is an excellent occasion for the evolution of a new ritual tradition.[9]

Restoration and re-story-ation are important tools in our local toolkits, and understood as ritual, they are both ecologically and spiritually regenerative. But I also think they will become essential methods for listening to what the land is asking for in a changing climate. Restoring historic baselines will be essential in

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[7] Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1993), 35.

[8] Kyle Powys Whyte, Joseph P. Brewer, and Jay T. Johnson. "Weaving Indigenous science, protocols and sustainability science." *Sustainability Science* 11 (2016): 25-32.

[9] Gretel Van Wieren, "Ecological Restoration as Public Spiritual Practice." *Worldviews* 12 (2008): 237-254.

some parts of the world, but in others we will need to experiment with new assemblages of species, novel ecosystems. Placefulness, as a practice of attending to what is and what is arising in our places, might be as much about tending to what needs healing as about making space for the unknown.

Troubling Place

It is also important to confront the ways that a place can be weaponized. Deep reverence for places can be caught up in conflict. Control over certain sacred places has been enlisted by ethno-nationalist agendas. For example, in 1992 Hindu nationalists demolished the Babri Masjid mosque because they claimed it was built by Muslim invaders over a previously occupied Hindu site. And Israel and Palestine continue to wrestle over each nation's deeply invested identity with their home place.

Placefulness also grapples with the West's egregious imperial and colonial history. In Vancouver, where I live, the beloved forests where I walk, the parks and neighborhoods are all part of the traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. To go into the forest and see only a natural place is to negate the fact that these are cultural landscapes whose ancient stewards have been stripped of their claims by force.

Like any spirituality worth its salt, placefulness then should attend to the good, the bad, and the ugly of the places we live. Placefulness should be able to grapple with the toxic dimension of sense of place as exhibited by ethnocentrism *and* the ravages of wildfire, extinction, and climate chaos that are dawning on every horizon.

BUSHWHACKING A PATH TOWARDS THE ECOZOIC ERA: NATURE IMMERSION EXPERIENCE AND THE FIELD OF RELIGION AND ECOLOGY

Kimberly Carfore

In this essay I offer my reflections on the field of religion and ecology from two different angles: first, as an educator, both as a professor of undergraduates across two different departments at the University of San Francisco—Theology and Religious Studies, and Environmental Studies—as well as an independent outdoor ecotheology educator; and second, as the current co-chair of the Religion and Ecology Unit of the American Academy of Religion (AAR). From those different angles, I consider a fork in the road of human civilization and, indeed, of the whole Earth community. On one side an Ecozoic era is ahead, and on the other side a Technozoic era. To start, let me explain those terms, which are likely familiar to many of the readers of this special issue.

In 2019 I received my PhD in the Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion program at the California Institute of Integral Studies, which was then one of the few programs to offer a graduate degree in this field of study. There I was introduced to the work of Thomas Berry. In *The Great Work*, Berry speaks of the choice

humanity needs to make as we transition from the Cenozoic era, which began around 65 million years ago after the extinction of the dinosaurs, to a new Earth era. At this fork in the road, we are to choose whether we transition into the Ecozoic era, where humans inhabit the planet as a mutually beneficial presence on the Earth, or we choose the Technozoic era, where humans continue to destroy the Earth community through extractive technologies and exploitative socioeconomic systems. The Great Work of our time is to choose and bring into being the Ecozoic.

Our own special role, which we will hand on to our children, is that of managing the arduous transition from the terminal Cenozoic to the emerging Ecozoic era, a period when humans will be present to the planet as participating members of the comprehensive Earth community. This is our Great Work and the work of our children.[1]

This fork in the road is aligned with the Anishnaabe prophecy as told by tribal members Winona LaDuke (Ojibwe) and Robin Kimmerer (Citizen Potawatomi).[2] In the Anishnaabe story, humanity stands at this crossroads. The scorched Earth path is well-trodden and familiar. But if we continue on this road we may not survive, and many of the species with which we coexist may not survive either. The other path is the green path. It is lush, but unfamiliar. It is the harder choice for some, since it requires so much change, but it is our best way into the future.

When I learned of this fork in the road, I thought to myself, "Oh, this decision will be easy. Of course, humanity will choose the green path." This makes the most sense. Aren't all natural beings attracted to green, lush places? This perspective was informed by the work I did before embarking on my graduate studies. I spent four years working as a field instructor for a wilderness therapy program serving at-risk youth. I lived a nomadic life, immersed in nature, tied to the rhythms and cycles of the natural world. I was away from phone lines, internet access, and the built environment for two weeks at a time. On my time off, I lived in my car and camped in the numerous regional and national parks of the American west. The peace and depth of belonging in nature I experienced during this immersive time in the wilderness was unmatched to this day. Even though I lived with nothing more than the things I carried on my back, I had everything I wanted. I have never experienced such a sense of wholeness, purpose, and passion as I did in the solitude of the desert wilderness, and during my time exploring the wild.

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[1] Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower), 7-8.

[2] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 360-373. Winona LaDuke and Deborah Cowen, "Beyond Windigo Infrastructure," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 119:2 (April 2020): 243-268.

Having had this experience, it seemed natural that everyone would want to experience this sense of wholeness and belonging. It is our birthright, plain and simple. But as of late, I am seeing how entrenched we are on the scorched Earth path and how deeply it has its hooks in us. Choosing the green path as a collective will be much more challenging than I previously considered. The rise of electric cars I see on the road (and not new light rail), new gains in AI technology and research, and the continuous disregard of the seriousness of our environmental crisis awakens me to observe how embedded our technological habits of mind, body, and spirit are.

This is especially true after the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools pivoted to online teaching as technology provided some salve for the challenges presented by lockdowns and social distancing. I have seen a rise in technologically addictive behaviors in the classroom as well. Just a few weeks before writing this piece, a student in my classroom was absentmindedly, and very loudly, typing away on his computer during my lecture. I stopped and politely told him to close his laptop, and he did so immediately and respectfully. However, within a matter of seconds, his hand impulsively reopened the laptop, and he went back to work (or perhaps play). The whole experience reminded me of a child sneaking a cookie from a cookie jar. The looks on the student's face told me he knew he should not have reopened his laptop, but it was as though his hand had a mind of its own, a Technozoic mind. This compulsive and sneaky demeanor of that student's hand is a metonym for the attitude that will lead humans to take the scorched Earth path. Long-term planning and systemic thinking are developmental achievements that take intention.

This New Story of our evolving cosmos and our living Earth community is an important narrative that invites people into the promise of the green path. Being captivated by screens and saturated by information and media noise make it difficult to tune into deep time, collective thinking, and intergenerational planning. Too much screen time has resulted in increased anxiety, shorter attention spans, lower pain tolerance, and disconnection from one's body and emotions. These are all symptoms of what Richard Louv calls "nature-deficit disorder."[3] To tackle nature deficit disorder, connecting with nature is the tonic to alleviate these symptoms, giving people a sense of purpose, and raising their general sense of well-being.

The attention economy feeds off our sacred awareness. It bombards us with ads, triggering news, polarizing narratives, making spaciousness and calm rarer and rarer to find. During her final presentation, a student shared an epiphany she had in my Nature Immersion course. She exclaimed, "It really shows how far off

[3] Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005).

of the path humans have gotten when spending time in nature feels so unnatural!" She was referring to the lack of tolerance students experience when exposed to the elements for prolonged periods of time. This is why a guide is important to teach students how to tap into their inner knower, how to deal with boredom, and how to connect with the sacredness of the Earth community. Time in nature can help us reconnect to that space, as the silence, solitude, and intentional awareness of our evolutionary entanglements can be seen, felt, and experienced.

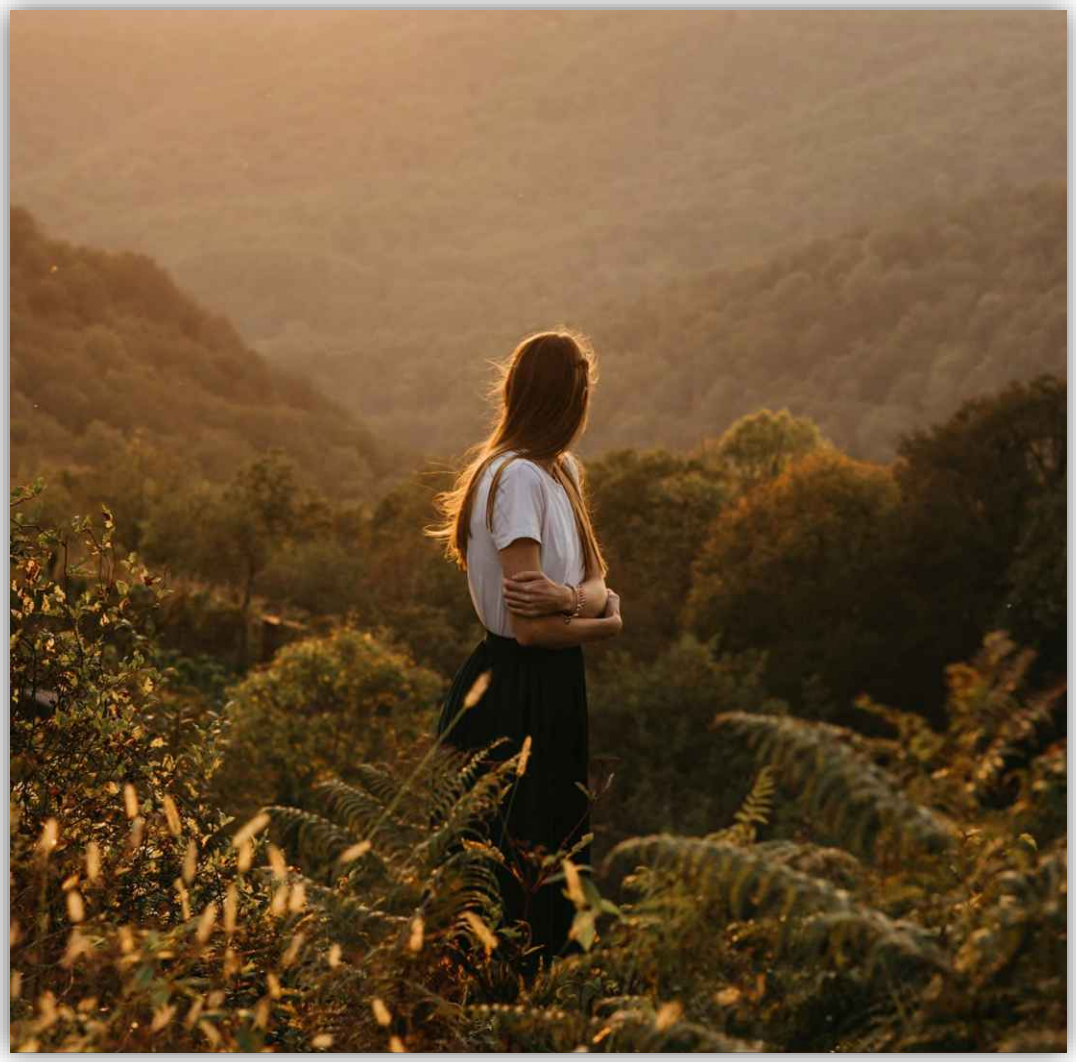

Photo by Dmitry Ganin on Unsplash

As an outdoor ecotheological educator I guide people of all ages to experience the sacredness of the natural world through outdoor nature immersion experiences. I have taught numerous groups and demographics including students from international universities, students at the University of San

Francisco, and clients from my nonprofit organization, Wild Women—a 501(c)3 whose mission is to educate and empower people in the outdoors, while deconstructing and critiquing the colonial, dominator narratives projected onto the wilderness. American wilderness culture, including bushcraft and survivalism, are essentially masculine-coded spaces. I offer outdoor educational experiences which include backpacking, adventure, and wilderness survival skills through an intersectional ecofeminist theological lens—an alternative to traditional colonial narratives of wilderness.

Included in my offerings are elements of the Universe Story which I offer as I lead backpacking trips and daylong excursions in the California wilderness. I teach ancestral skills—including friction fire making (bow drill as well as flint and steel), cordage, traps, plant identification, and tracking—while opening people to the sacredness of the cosmos and facilitating awe-inspiring experiences. This is aligned with Pope Francis' visions for an "ecological conversion," which he calls for in his ecological encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. The Pope is not calling for people to convert to Catholicism in the wilderness; rather, he is calling "every person living on this planet" to convert to ecology.[4] To me, connecting to the external wild is connecting to the wild within. Awakening oneself to this wildness is connecting to a deeper, more abiding, ecological self.

Awakening to an ecological self is reinventing the human at the species level. Nature immersion experiences are a catalyst to shed our skins of false selves, tapping into an identity that is tied to land and Earth. Being grounded in nature allows us to realign our morals and values with our ecological and cosmological context. I am realizing now that people need to be introduced to nature (both inner and outer) and guided in order to experience this sense of wholeness in the outdoors. It is not just about spending time in nature. What is required is time with intentional engagement in nature.[5] This is what drew me to found Wild Women. My slogan is, "You can't protect something you haven't met yet, and you can't love something that you don't know." Of my many goals for the future, one is to partner with other ecofeminist organizations who empower Indigenous women in their local communities as well as those involved in international politics. For example, the Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN), founded by Osprey Orielle Lake, is a great organization to follow. In addition, when Wild Women grows, I envision offering free spiritual resources for environmental and climate activists.

As the chair for several years of the Religion and Ecology unit of the AAR alongside Joseph Wiebe, and as a steering committee member for a few years

[4] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2015), sec. 3.

[5] Miles Richardson, Iain Hamlin, Carly Butler, Rory Thomas, and Alex Hunt, "Actively Noticing Nature (Not Just Time in Nature) Helps Promote Nature Connectedness," *Journal of Ecopsychology*, 14:1 (March 2022): 8-16.

prior to that, I have seen the field shift over the past decade taking seriously the call for greater inclusivity in the field. We have partnered with the Native Traditions in the Americas Unit and Indigenous Religious Traditions Units to create co-sponsored sessions each year to develop shared discourse and dialogue regarding our concerns for the future of the planet. Our steering committee vets paper proposals with an eye for interreligious dialogue, offering spaces for marginalized perspectives to not only be included, but be centered.

We are blessed to have a skilled team of caring, intelligent, and informed committee members. Scholar and former Religion and Ecology unit chair Christopher Carter has highlighted racial perspectives in the field, creating space for scholars traditionally marginalized in the field, and hosting difficult conversations. Steering Committee member Terra Schwerin Rowe, studying the crossroads of religion and petrocultures, recently created a seminar on energy and extractivism. The future is full of problems, to be sure, but it is also incredibly rich with promise.

We feel the call for more practical engagements within the field as our moment calls for action and activism. In coming years, we will highlight activism and non-anthropocentric perspectives as forms of religious resistance to the dominant colonial, consumer culture. As we work to create a more inclusive field, in the many meanings of this terminology, the goal has always remained the same: to protect our sacred planet and all life on Earth, for present and future generations.

ECOLOGICAL RITUALS FOR THE DEEP WORLD

Sarah M. Pike

In October 2020, a group of solemn figures dressed in red gowns and veils, their faces painted white, silently processed over a fire-scarred landscape of ash and dead trees in southern California. They were members of the Red Rebel Brigade, associated with Extinction Rebellion Los Angeles, at the Lake Fire burn site in the Angeles National Forest, north of Santa Clarita, California. According to Extinction Rebellion Los Angeles's Facebook page, one participant observed that, "The destruction of the forests and all life that has been wrought by climate change, and in this case, by the devastating wildfires, was so deeply palpable as I looked out into the barren and desolate landscape." The post continued: "The Red Rebel Brigade both acknowledges the deep grief that the destruction of earth and life causes us to feel, while also reminding us that we MUST change, and that CHANGE IS POSSIBLE."

The Red Rebels' procession across a devastated landscape is one example of many kinds of spiritual but not explicitly religious contemporary rituals addressing environmental grief. Ceremonial practices that mourn the loss of nonhuman life due to human actions express sacred relationships with the other-than-human living world, although these practices often take place in secular spaces, such as public parks, town squares, urban streets, and even highways.

Much of my research has focused on spiritual expressions found outside institutional religious settings at nature sanctuaries, ecstatic dance events, ancestral skills gatherings, transformational festivals like Burning Man, and environmental protests. I am particularly interested in how ritual practices responding to environmental grief express relationships with other species. In the article "Ritual Responses to Environmental Apocalypse in Activist Communities," I describe these practices as *ecological rituals* that draw attention to our interconnected relationships with the other-than-human world. Of course, many other ritualized activities, such as land restoration practices, are also ecological rituals, but it is those responding to grief that I want to discuss in this essay.

In a 2003 article "Ritual Theory and the Environment," ritual studies scholar Ronald Grimes describes some ways in which people are turning to rituals such as tree ordination, symbolic walks re-enacting the story of evolution, and ritualizing prairie burnings for restoring ecosystems as "effective means of saving the planet from environmental destruction." But in what ways are these rituals effective in "saving the planet"? Grimes published another essay in 2002 about ritual and the environment that was based on a performance piece, "Performance is Currency in the Deep World's Gift Economy: An Incantatory Riff for a Global Medicine Show." Grimes' "riff" is on an anecdote that poet Gary Snyder recounts in his book, *The Practice of the Wild* (1990), in which a woman asks Snyder, "If we have made such good use of animals, eating them, singing about them, drawing them, riding them, and dreaming about them, what do they get back from us?" "Excellent question," replies Snyder, "The Ainu say that the deer, salmon, and bear like our music and are fascinated by our languages." "So," continues Snyder, "we sing to the fish or the game, speak words to them, say grace. Periodically, we dance for them. A song for your supper. Performance is currency in the deep world's gift economy." I would add, "We grieve for them" to Snyder's list. Following Snyder and Grimes, what might performances like the mourning procession of Red Rebels across a fire-devastated landscape mean for the "deep world" of other-than-human beings?

Ecological rituals bind human lives to the other-than-human world by calling into question boundaries between self and other (the living and the dead, human and land, human and other animal). Rituals for the deep world involving actions, gestures, fake blood, animal masks, coffins, red robes, and other props, make, re-make, erode, transcend, and cross species boundaries. These ecological rituals express kinship relationships between human and other-than-human and, *at the same time*, constitute these relationships.

The Red Rebel Brigade procession mourned losses due to a devastating wildfire: a forest gone, homes destroyed, animal lives lost. The procession pointed to larger losses due to climate-change-fueled disasters around the

world—the "destruction . . . wrought by climate change." How do we relate and respond to huge and often distant climate-related losses? Perhaps we do so through our relationship to more intimate losses, the ones we encounter directly: a burn scar near our homes or a dead animal at the side of the road. We might mourn by getting involved in direct action to draw attention to climate change We might mourn through ceremony. Grief in this case is an expression of deeply felt bonds with other species and is a significant factor in creating those bonds and encouraging us to take action.

Take roadkill for example. The well-known nature writer Barry Lopez (1945-2020), author of *Horizon*, *Arctic Dreams*, *Of Wolves and Men,* and many other books, had a habit of removing dead animals from highways. He made ceremonies for them with burial and prayer. In 1998 he published a slim book, *Apologia*, about his experiences with roadkill on a 1989 trip from Oregon to Indiana:

> South of Broken Bow, at dawn, I cannot avoid an immature barn swallow. It hangs by its head, motionless in the slats of the grill. . . The raccoons and, later, a red fox carry like sacks of wet gravel and sand. Each animal is like a solitary child's shoe in the road. Once a man asked, "Why do you bother?" You never know, I said. The ones you give some semblance of burial, to whom you offer an apology, may have been like seers in a parallel culture. It is an act of respect, a technique of awareness."

In another tender piece of writing on roadkill, "The Doe's Song," an essay published in *Orion* magazine, author Leath Tonino describes how he began tallying dead animals on the road during his travels across country, organizing his tally by species. He writes, "I have tried to say goodbye, I have tried many ways, many times, to say goodbye. The most we can do is pause, pray, give thanks, apologize, make ceremonies, make them a part of the very life that kills other lives." One night he was driving with a friend who hit a doe on the road. He can offer no solace to his friend, nor to the doe. He wonders: "

> And what if the doe by the side of the road is not a deer. What if the doe is an aquifer, an ocean, the night's very darkness? What if the doe is the once black soil? What if the car that hit the doe is a light switch, a faucet, a new shirt? What if the car is our everyday experience, our reality, our modern way, and what if it is constantly murdering the smooth brown bodies we love?"

In the end he sings a song: "I sang that gentle tune, the tune for the doe, the song of goodbye, which I still remember today, years later."

Like Lopez's burials, the doe's song is a performance for the deep world, a rite of loss and mourning. Such ceremonies or "techniques of awareness," as Lopez calls them, constitute relationships of respect, include care for nonhuman others, and encourage identification with these others as belonging to a network of kin. Lopez's and Tonino's stories of ritually caring for animal kin killed by cars and environmental-protest performances like the Red Rebel procession, model ways of acting in the face of grief for the suffering of other species. They honor nonhuman lives that have been destroyed by human actions, but they also aim to have an impact on observers. Images of Lopez burying roadkill and Tonino singing for a doe change how we see roadkill. The sharp contrast between the Red Rebels' blood-red robes and an ashen landscape makes a striking image, beautiful and tragic, of climate-fueled disaster. It sends a message to participants and observers that change is necessary and draws attention to the scarred land as something sacred, worthy of grieving.

In a similar fashion, holding funerals for other animals at environmental protests reminds us of our connection to other species and our responsibilities to them. In 2018, Extinction Rebellion (XR) protests spread around the world, beginning in the United Kingdom by blocking bridges and roads with crowds of protesters and demanding attention to the climate crisis. These XR protests featured various performances, such as throwing fake blood on public monuments and buildings and staging die-ins and funerals for extinct and

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endangered species. Large and small-scale XR and other climate protests received significant media coverage around the world for the two years before the pandemic and have continued to attract public attention since 2021. XR was especially visible at COP 25 (Conference of Parties: a gathering of world leaders to work on climate issues) in Spain in 2019 and COP 26 in Scotland in 2021. XR's website lists groups in eighty-six countries and protests by these groups may include a few people or thousands.

The bodies of protesters acting together on city streets, in museums, and in front of town squares, embassies, and stock exchanges transformed public, secular spaces into sacred spaces of commemoration, just as Barry Lopez transformed a highway shoulder into a ceremonial site. "Our Earth is Dying," read the lament on a Youth Climate Strike website, inspired by then 14-year-old Swedish activist Greta Thunberg's 2018 school strike for climate. In January 2020, as Australia burned, youth-led climate strikes and XR protests called for vigils to bring attention to the dead and dying, human and nonhuman, as well as the destruction of important spiritual and cultural places of Indigenous Australians. The so-called "Black Summer" bushfires of 2019/2020 killed billions of other animals and at least thirty-three humans. In November 2021, Extinction Rebellion Australia held a koala funeral march that included a person wearing black clothes and a black veil tolling a bell, some Red Rebels, a funeral band, and a huge koala puppet called Blinky, composed of a koala head, and a skeleton with fur peeling off, screaming and smoking as if on fire.

Funeral processions like the koala funeral march are a striking ritual tactic employed by XR and other protest organizers that emphasize our shared endangered future and our kinship with other animals. In Bath, England in 2024, XR and the Red Rebel Brigade organized the Funeral for Nature procession that included four hundred Red Rebels in flowing red gowns and hundreds of mourners in black. A funeral bier with a white figure lying in a bed of moss and plants represented Mother Earth and was carried by pallbearers dressed in green robes. Drummers played a funeral march as the procession made its way through the city to an ancient abbey. Sarah Fraser, a participant interviewed for an ITV news story, made black hats with animals on them to wear in the procession. She explained, "It's great to bring the species that we're talking about into the procession with us." These funeral-protests challenge assumptions about what and who is of value, reminding participants and observers of our interconnected relationships with other species by using practices of identification.

This kind of kinship and identification with the other-than-human world is expressed especially clearly in Red Rebel Brigade performances at environmental protests. Red Rebels are performance artists with origins in the 1990s. Although their performances are totally silent, Red Rebels communicate through emotion. At one protest/performance, Red Rebels circulated a flyer that read,

> We are your blood; that of our planet, the blood of all extinguished species, of our burning forests, our dying oceans, our polluted rivers. We are the blood of all the past and future casualties of climate, of the war against the planet. . . . We are the blood of the Indigenous people fighting for their right to exist, to preserve their culture, to save our world. We are the children and the animals. We are trees and the flowers. . . . We mourn our losses now to help you awaken."

For Red Rebels, kinship is expressed with the idea of shared blood as well as sacrificial blood of the "casualties of climate." Processions in which protesters identify with dead and dying animals intend to "awaken" observers to the ways in which we are always connected to and in relationship with other species.

In other rites of mourning organized by XR activists, identification with other species is expressed by the way participants position themselves as vulnerable bodies, lying on city streets, drawing attention to vulnerable species. Cyclists filling the air with the sounds of bees swarmed the Tate Modern Museum in London in 2019 and collapsed at the entrance to symbolize colony collapse. In 2023, die-ins were staged at the New York Natural History Museum near a statue of a Tyrannosaurus Rex. In Frome, England, in 2018, funeral processions with pallbearers wearing felt animal masks made by a local artist carried a coffin draped with the XR logo while musicians played a funeral march, and one protester read a list of extinct and endangered species.

XR was not the first organization to hold such funerals. Some years before the founding of XR, the first International Remembrance Day for Lost Species was held in 2011. According to Nick Hunt's blog, "A Bell for Lost Species" on the *Dark Mountain Project* website, annual observations of this day have included "funeral pyres for the great auk in Scotland and Wales, a candlelit vigil for butterflies in Belgium, and cairns for lost species appearing from Sweden to the Galapagos Islands." As rites of grief, these funerals and die-ins bring the concerns of nonhumans visibly and audibly into public spaces and ritually constitute our relationships of care for them.

Protesters express ultimate values with their vulnerable and precarious bodies: values such as the integrity of the planet and our intimate connections with other species facing extinction, who, like us, deserve a livable future. Climate activists make visible the disruptions of climate change and other forms of life on Earth that are being affected, as well as identifying Indigenous communities and poor communities disproportionately bearing the brunt of climate change. Often invisible "others," humans and other-than-humans, are brought into public view when activists' bodies assemble in the streets, referencing the lives of suffering others, symbolized by masks of or coffins for extinct animals, mournful music, and blood spilled performatively.

By processing through and occupying public spaces, using blood and ritualized actions such as lying in front of statues to disrupt everyday routines, these activists' performances bring grief and endangerment into public awareness. In the essay "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," philosopher Judith Butler argues that protesters' bodies moving together transform the meanings of public spaces. Butler explains that protesting bodies create *alliances* that express the society protesters want to bring into being and temporarily sever the order that exists between public space and state power. According to Butler, "Bodies . . . find and produce the public through seizing and reconfiguring the matter of material environments; at the same time those material environments are part of the action." Funerals for extinct species and other climate protests occupy and reconfigure secular spaces, such as museums and city squares, into sacred spaces of mourning, demanding we respond to the climate crisis.

Photo by Ashley Batz on Unsplash

As rites of grief (and hope for change), climate protests consecrate the streets and act out utopian aspirations in public view. Through the physical process of dressing like extinct species, carrying Mother Earth on a bier, identifying with other species and with marginalized human communities, climate protesters enact the social order they want to bring about. Their actions are interventions that turn streets that carry cars burning fossil fuels into sites of mourning and hope for a different future. Ecological rituals, from praying and burying roadkill to marching in funeral processions for extinct species, are responses to eco-grief that have the potential for healing individuals, communities, and relationships, especially after climate-fueled disasters such as catastrophic wildfires. Whether intimate care for roadside dead or global climate actions, these rites of grief are gift offerings to the deep world and to ourselves.

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REWILDING CHRISTIANITY: FROGS, FIREFLIES, INCARNALITY

Lisa E. Dahill

On the evening of the full moon, nineteen of us ride out of London, Ohio, heading southwest on the Prairie Grass Trail toward South Charleston. It's a beautiful ten-mile ride. The trail threads through woods, meadows, cultivated farm fields, near homesteads with roadside ditches full of water this June night. The air is thick with humidity and it's warm as we ride toward the setting sun, appreciating the colors filling the sky long after sundown. I try to notice each potential hazard on the trail: a fallen branch on the outbound side just before a certain road crossing, a pile of brush or scattered debris after another. But mostly I'm enjoying the pull of muscles and the scattered conversations as riders drift forward and back in the group. In South Charleston we get ice cream at the Purple Monkey and enjoy a rest, and when we get ready to ride back it is dark. As we start east again on the trail, suddenly the full moon becomes visible rising huge over a field before us. All the way back it will beckon us forward.

In this return trip, the ride has an entirely different feel. I try to ride solo, staying far from those who outfit their bikes with auto-grade lights that illumine the trail so every leaf casts a shadow. That's not why I'm here. Given that my bike's puny light shows only a few feet ahead of me, I would see an obstacle only as I was just about to hit it and crash. That means I don't want to ride too close to others with similarly weak lights, because the risk of collision is too dangerous. So I look for a spot to ride solo toward the front of the pack as we stretch out, keeping my internalized map of the path's obstacles in mind as I push into the

dark. The dark becomes its own animal, thick and dense and alive, and I sink into it, this space that is shared. With little visual data but the moon and its shadows, I am disoriented into a state of huge sensory impressions. Fascination as the simultaneous heavy stillness of the warm humid air and its bike-generated movement ripple across my skin, the powerful kinetic sense of muscles straining and balance reflexes steering me securely even with limited visual orientation, every neuron firing. Equally I hear sounds, the calls and shrills of frogs and toads fill the world: below me in the ditches to high up in the trees, from seemingly inches away to far across the fields, from species of all kinds and sizes in this water-saturated world. These cries stretch across a staggering musical range, basso bullfrogs to sopranino peepers, their voices layering and pulling my mind and heart in all directions with them as I speed through. And then, as if the feel of the air and its spring scents in my throat and the calls of the amphibian opera were not enough, the fireflies begin—and now the woods and fields sparkle near and far with pulsing lights, bright and dimmer, fast and measured, low and high. The dark itself is a presence, soft, opening into all this perception, this breathtaking, breath-deepening immersion into a world of beings surrounding me on all sides, above and below, the very air filled with insects and microbes and water, the huge white moon slowly rising. When we get back to the trailhead in London, someone has set up a telescope and Saturn is visible: the whole universe, it seems, is present this miraculous night.

Experiences like this—or kayaking or snorkeling; encountering life above, below, around on all sides in a thickness of unaccustomed perception—are what first surprised me into awareness of the astonishing and humbling interspecies world in which we live, of existing by pure grace in a "more-than-human world."[1] On the face of it, experiences like these may not often be what people seem to mean when they talk about experiencing the Christian God—at least such experiences were not where my sense of the divine was primarily shaped growing up in the church, nor in my most powerful and formative experiences as an adult of the Jesus whose unexpected showing up in my life was sweetness beyond measure.

Those experiences proved to be the door through which I eventually moved out into the incarnate holiness of the entire world. Jesus had surprised me in my high-strung early thirties, arriving in my psyche as a huge new reality of mercy opening a space for wild, endless love I had never imagined. Jesus was the experience of being loved and loved and loved, being held in love with complete and unshakable security as a new floor for my being, grounding in a love that gradually allowed me to slow and soften, rest, and go deep into the dreamwork,

[1] David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1996).

therapy, shadow exploration that in time healed my childhood traumas and allowed me to step into a new adult self able to love and give myself freely in the world. For sixteen years, through grad school, post-doc, and the first six years of my time on the faculty of Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, I soaked in this love in worship—for much of that time daily—and in extended daily or near-daily periods of contemplative prayer. I became an oblate of the Camaldolese Benedictine community in Big Sur and Berkeley, California, whose rhythms of contemplative daily communal worship balanced beautifully the fullness of music, aesthetics, intergenerational energy, and social justice of the worship and community life of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in San Francisco. I thought I would be a lover of Jesus forever and of the trinitarian and cosmic/evolutionary fullness of the divine this love opened up.

Photo by Ray Shrewsberry on Unsplash

And maybe I still am. But in a 2011-2012 sabbatical from Trinity, which I spent mostly outdoors, something shifted. It was as if the chancel walls gave way and I stepped through and realized it's *all* chancel, this sacramental world, the real world. This sending was not my own idea; it simply happened, shoving me out into a vast world where religion, in the forms I had known, doesn't matter. I can't seem to come back inside; the creation itself is all I want, its wild particularity and beauty, its complexity. And having pondered this for years, I've

realized that this urge out into the wildness of the world was an invitation not out of faith but into some stranger face of God: being invited to learn from the creation about what is holy in wild languages I don't understand—bird languages, drought languages, smells and winds, predation, illness, death, life… the natural world my holy book.[2]

I came to realize that the logic of the incarnation itself was expanding into a full-bodied Earth-filling world-enchanting pantheism: it is not just Jesus but the whole world that is God.

This is not orthodox Christianity. Most Christians, including people like me who all our lives have been passionately world-embracing environmentalists hold a sense of the divine that is at some level conceptually separate from the world. By definition, God is that which gives rise to the world, which perhaps permeates the world intimately but is ultimately not the world; in fact, pantheism is so unthinkable for Christians that, as Mary-Jane Rubenstein explores brilliantly in *Pantheologies: Gods, Worlds, Monsters,* it fails to register as a credible theological stance at all.[3] Yet over these years, I have been experiencing the world as not only intrinsically holy, but as in fact the divine reality itself. I began finding myself worshiping Earth, a locus of devotion that soon put me at some remove from almost all indoor worship. The God worshiped in buildings designed and scaled and intended for humans only, with language and actions meant for humans only (baptizing, feeding, embracing, preaching), seemed increasingly unreal. Even the hymns and architecture and symbols that had been for me so saturated with love and beauty no longer functioned as icons of real-time spiritual encounter.

Yet the whole religion snapped back into focus and made profound sense again if I simply substituted the word "Earth" for "God" throughout.[4] It was magical. For prayers of confession, we confess not to a God but to the *actual* source of our lives: "O Earth, we confess that we are alienated from you and choosing destructive paths." That suddenly feels like precisely the truth-telling

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[2] Lisa E. Dahill, "Rewilding Christian Spirituality: Outdoor Sacraments and the Life of the World," in *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril,* ed. Lisa E. Dahill and James B. Martin-Schramm (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 181.

[3] Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Pantheologies: Gods, Worlds, Monsters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). Many eco-theologians prefer a panentheistic perspective, including those who image the natural world itself as the primal sacrament; see, e.g., from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, John Chryssavgis, *Creation as Sacrament: Reflections on Ecology and Spirituality* (London: T&T Clark, 2019). Cláudio Carvalhaes comes close to pantheism in *Ritual at World's End: Essays on Eco-Liturgical Liberation Theology,* foreword by Ivone Gebara (York, PA: Barber's Son Press, 2021).

[4] I first proposed this use of "Earth" as a liturgical name for God in "Addressing God with Names of Earth: Bonhoeffer and the Living Reality of Prayer," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 43/3 (July 2016): 27-31.

for which we need collective ritual invitation. For invocations, this substitution might lead to prayers like, "O Earth, powerful and compassionate, you shepherd your people, faithfully feeding and protecting us. Heal each of us, and make us a whole people, that we may embody the justice and peace of . . . Jesus Christ."[5] Each time I made this switch, new questions lit up: what does it mean to consider Earth "shepherding" us, i.e., what would a religion look like that turned to Earth systems and place-based forms of knowing and life together for guidance on how to live as humans? What might "the justice and peace of Jesus Christ" mean within an interspecies and intergenerational Earth community of beings?

At the same time, as a Bonhoeffer scholar I have been moving deeply into Bonhoeffer's rejection in his *Ethics* of God-world dualism. A dualism of "realms," he writes, is the sickness infecting most of Christian history, a "Colossus obstructing our way."[6] The dominant theological conception after the New Testament has been the basic conception [of] two realms [that] bump against each other: one divine, holy, supernatural . . . ; the other worldly, profane, natural . . . . Reality as a whole splits into two parts, and . . . the concern of Christ becomes a partial, provincial affair within the whole of reality.[7]

That entire conception is false, he asserts, destroying the logic of the incarnation itself. For Bonhoeffer, "reality" (*Wirklichkeit*) is visible only when the fundamental unity of God and the world in Jesus Christ is perceived, beheld. "There are not two realities, but only *one reality,* and that is God's reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world."[8] Any attempt to think of "God" and "world" as separate creates an abstraction, in his terms.[9] The deeply entrenched Christian tendency to conceive of reality as split, "God" separate from "world," is for him a millennia-long perceptual error creating abstractions of both halves of the dualism: a God increasingly un-credible to postmodern sensibilities in the "world come of age" and a degraded, desecrated view of the world and biological life stripped of their beauty, holiness, sacredness. The holy dies—for this separative "God" doesn't exist—and so does the world robbed of its intrinsic holiness, made to be purely commodity. God-world dualism destroys reality.

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[5] Prayer of the Day for Proper 11B/Lectionary 16, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship,* Assembly Edition (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 42.

[6]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics,* ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, et al., Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (DBWE), volume 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 55.

[7] DBWE 6:56.

[8] DBWE 6:58. For further exploration of these questions in Bonhoeffer, see Lisa E. Dahill, "One Reality, Not Two: Bonhoeffer, Jesus Christ, and a Membraned World," in *Views of Nature and Dualism: Rethinking Philosophical, Theological, and Religious Assumptions in the Anthropocene,* ed. Thomas Hastings and Knut-Willi Sæther (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 173-200.

[9] DBWE 6:54.

Thomas Berry takes this insight further: "We will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred only if we appreciate the universe beyond ourselves as a revelatory experience of that numinous presence whence all things came into being. Indeed, the universe is the primary sacred reality."[10] What if culturally normative forms of human religion had been consistently directing our profound religious intuitions and worship in this way to the universe itself, and to Earth, soil, water, creatures, beauty, the patterns and needs of a given place and its multiply interrelated forms of life? What if Christians spent as much time and love and explicitly religious reverence poring over and becoming fluent in the local, regional, planetary, and cosmic languages of the "Book of Nature" as they do the books of scripture?[11] Such practices radically de-center the narrowly human perspectives of colonial/economic violence and privilege that white Western Christians have too long asserted as normative; they cast us out into wild new perspectives and webs of relations that may, if we can listen deeply enough soon enough, radically recast our infantilizing habits of mind and action, so destructive of our shared soul. I wish for Christianity this unapologetically Earth-centering, Earth-worshiping practice.

The Christian sacraments are a powerful place to locate these questions. I advocate a return of the practice of baptism to the local creeks, rivers, lakes, and other nearby bodies of wild water, arguing that because the forms of ritual shape participants' experience on profound levels, the practice of baptism into wild water invites Christians into this experience of the world itself as holy, dripping and swarming and flapping with holiness.[12] Similarly, practices of outdoor Eucharist that include ritually the countless non-human members of the worshiping body in a given place (as well as the shocking fact of our non-negotiable implication with them in Earth's food webs of eating and being eaten) allow Christians to experience the primal gift of food as the astonishing miracle it

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[10] Thomas Berry, "The Wild and the Sacred," in *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Harmony/Bell Tower, 1999), 49.

[11] See Belden Lane, *The Great Conversation: Nature and the Care of the Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Victoria Loorz, *Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2022); and Jacob H. Sherman, "Reading the Book of Nature after Nature," *Religions* 11/4 (2020): https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11040205.

[12] In addition to "Rewilding Christian Spirituality," I articulate this proposal in "Living, Local, Wild Waters: Into Baptismal Reality," in *Encountering Earth: Thinking Theologically with a More-than-Human World,* ed. Trevor George Hunsberger Bechtel, Matthew Eaton, and Timothy Harvie (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 151-65; and "This Creek Is the Baptismal River: Baptism as Immersion into Reality," *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts* 56/2 (2022): 21-28.

is, some creatures' tissues—their bodies and blood—being given for us, becoming our bodies and blood, which soon enough in turn also becomes theirs.[13]

How might human spiritual and ritual practices more adequately invite worshipers into this "contact and conviviality with what is not human"[14] of which David Abram writes so movingly? How might Christianity shed its God-world dualism and relax into the worship of the universe itself? I long to live ever more fully into communion with the amphibians and fireflies of those humid summer rides, the endless layers of creatures' voices and luminescence, thick textured air, full moon rising into an expanse of mystery, all of it together the divine presence, all of it worthy of worship. Indeed, I am coming to call the vision and experience of that endlessly expansive divine presence *incarnality,* the holiness of all that is.[15] The cosmologically situated animate Earth, our merciful and miraculous God, is our source and wisdom and pattern and home. It is as well—along with countless humans and other vulnerable creatures of this and all future generations—the one/s our economic systems and forms of consumption are in the process of crucifying. May Christians learn anew what worshiping this whole Earth, precisely here, might mean.

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[13] Lisa E. Dahill, "Eating and Being Eaten: Interspecies Vulnerability as Eucharist," *Religions* 204 (2020): doi:10.3390/rel11040204.

[14] Abram, *Spell,* 22. The full passage unpacks ecologically, you could say, Bonhoeffer's diagnosis of dualistic perception as an abstraction: "Caught up in a mass of abstractions, our attention hypnotized by a host of human-made technologies that only reflect us back to ourselves, it is all too easy for us to forget our carnal inherence in a more-than-human matrix of sensations and sensibilities. Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth – our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with other eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and the honking of geese. To shut ourselves off from these other voices, to continue by our lifestyles to condemn these other sensibilities to the oblivion of extinction, is to rob our own senses of their integrity, and to rob our minds of their coherence. We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human."

[15] My current book project develops this insight more fully in dialogue with Bonhoeffer and many other theological and philosophical voices, from David Abram and Thomas Berry to Mary-Jane Rubenstein, Donna Haraway, and Victoria Loorz. Its working title is *Incarnality: Christian Worship of Earth* (in process, Fortress Press), inviting readers into a joyfully pantheistic Christian vision.

A JOURNEY OF CREATION-CENTERED MINISTRY

Nancy Wright

My formation in relation with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry began with assigned reading of Teilhard at Barnard College in 1970. Reading in the lofty Columbia library of his vision of all creation, I knew that I had found an articulation of an insight that centered me. Teilhard perceived the movement toward unity of Earth and humanity in complexity and consciousness, drawn by Christ, the Soul of Earth. This vision seemed to match my feelings of wonder and joy in the beauty of the sun setting on the majestic Rocky Mountains, relished from my childhood home in Denver, Colorado.

Always enchanted by the mysteries disclosed in worship at my Colorado Congregational church (especially hearing the pastor read Psalm 139 during Holy Communion), I then felt drawn to study Jungian thought for a BA at Barnard College in World Religions and for a Master of Divinity degree at Union Theological Seminary in Psychiatry and Religion. At Union, theologian Daniel Day Williams exposed his students to process theology, which again centered me in Teilhard's thought.

Happily, in the late 1970s, I met Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim at a friend's party, and life was never the same! Immediately I was propelled to the Riverdale Center, where I sat listening and absorbing the insights of Thomas Berry and many fascinating people gathered around him. Most remarkable, perhaps, was his delight in the wonders of creation linked indissolubly with his

deep scholarship of the world's cultures and religions. He would voice deep lament at the extinction of Earth's species in an expressive manner I will never forget. These experiences inspired me to join the board of the American Teilhard Association, where I have served until the present day.

After ordination in the United Church of Christ at Riverside Church in 1973, I established the West Side Ecumenical Ministry to the Elderly, an urban ministry in New York City. In that great city, the Hudson River, Central Park, and the neighborhood's trees all spoke to me. Soon afterwards I was on a bus to New Jersey to spend a week at Genesis Farm, studying with Sr. Miriam MacGillis. I walked out into the field one day where I said to God, "I care so much about the environment." God replied, "That's good, but you need credentials."

So I studied for an MA in Environmental Conservation Education at New York University. It was during this time that Thomas Berry purchased Roderick Nash's *The Rights of Nature* for me. Decades of creation-centered ministry followed.

At Earth Ministry in the Puget Sound bioregion, I organized Green Teams in congregations and served as editor for *Earth Letter*. I traveled to India and Africa with Coordination in Development, Inc. (CODEL), a thirty-five-member ecumenical consortium that fostered sustainable development projects. I visited various water, agricultural, and forestry projects and met wonderful colleagues who dedicated their lives to sustainability. I also co-authored a book with Fr. Donald Kill, *Ecological Healing: A Christian Vision* (Orbis 1993).

In 2006, Ascension Lutheran Church in Burlington, Vermont, called me to be its pastor, where I served until 2022. The heart-stopping beauty of Lake Champlain nestled against the layered blue Adirondack mountains inspired wonder and joy each day of those sixteen years.

The congregation conducted an active ministry centered on the lake through worship, research, and art activities expressed in the "Congregational Watershed Manual." Vermont Interfaith Power and Light (VTIPL) and ECHO, Leahy Center for Lake Champlain supported publication of the manual, which VTIPL offers free for download.[1] The congregation's work and my study of water—including its symbolic and physical aspects—led to a DMin in Transformational Leadership from Boston University School of Theology (2018).

I was stimulated and inspired continually by studying with Helen Narayan Liebenson at the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center, through her daily drop-in calls established during COVID, and other courses. When I first heard her *metta* prayer for the well-being and health of all creatures, I felt deeply moved and at home. I also began studies with the Green Mountain Druid Order. Based in the

[1] https://vtipl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/CongregationalWatershedManual-InterreligiousEdition-Jan2019.pdf.

beauty of the Dreamland Sanctuary in the Green Mountains of Vermont, our senses, imagination, and ancient practices were enlisted to draw in and concentrate energy for the healing of self and planet absorbed my energy and honed commitments.

A new ministry evolved. As pastor for Creation Care for the New England Lutherans, I worked with congregations to foster creation care. I recently moved to Connecticut and became facilitator of the Fossil Fuel Finance team for Third Act Connecticut.[2] On July 8, 2024, I joined in nonviolent direct action against Citibank's fossil fuel financing, which led to my being arrested for the first time in my life (though perhaps not my last), along with over six hundred other elders as part of the thirteen-week Summer of Heat.[3] I also facilitated a meeting between the Travelers Insurance company and Stop the Money Pipeline leaders.

Through these decades I have read many books and articles on religion and ecology. I have discovered that the insights expressed in them often repeat and build on those of Thomas Berry. All these years, the friendship of Mary Evelyn and John has been unwavering and galvanizing.

Where is the church and love of nature now? How can we realize the unity of spirit and matter, the moving forward of the cosmos toward the unity that Teilhard envisioned? If all creation groans for the revelation of the children of God (Romans 8:21-22), what are we to do?

Photo by Ashley Inguanta on Unsplash

[2] https://thirdact.org/connecticut/.

[3] https://thirdact.org/nyc/2024/04/30/summer-of-heat-official-website.

Let us invite people to be out in nature, to fall in love again with the natural world. Many churches are exploring outdoor worship, and wild churches are emerging.[4] At the same time, let us advocate for an end to fossil fuels, for protection of land and water, and for renewable energy, through organizations like 350.org and Third Act.

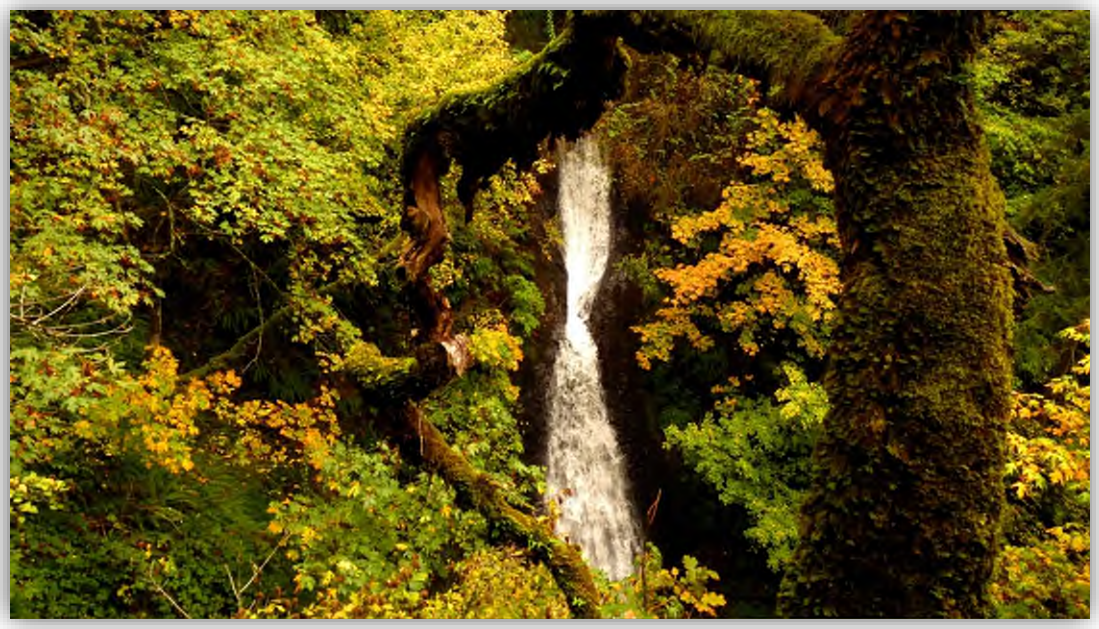
My personal journey at this time combines studies in the Goodwin Master Naturalist Program and in the Forest Therapy Training Certificate program. I will soon have completed the third and final year as a Druid in the Green Mountain Druid Order.

If my own deep interests serve as a guide, I perceive that we may now center ourselves within both deepened scientific knowledge of the wonders of creation and committed activism that protects Earth. The church, I firmly believe, can be reborn through such renewed attention to matter and spirit with inspired activism rooted in love.

[4] https://www.wildchurchnetwork.com/.

TOWARD AN INTERSECTIONAL INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

Jim Robinson

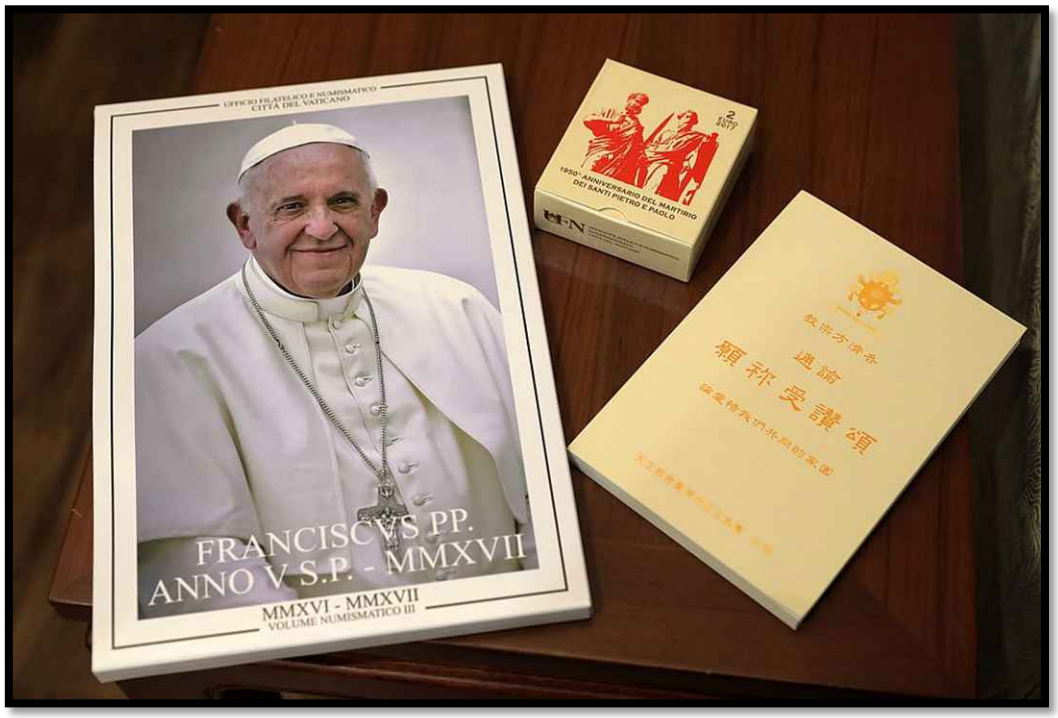


In *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home,* Pope Francis promotes an integral ecology, which intends to account for the entanglement of environmentalism and social justice. Throughout the encyclical, Francis compellingly addresses the intersection of ecological degradation and the plight of people experiencing poverty. For instance, Francis asserts that "we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*."[1] Though Francis consistently emphasizes the inextricable link between social justice and ecology throughout the encyclical, and though he fervently critiques the devastating impact of poverty, he does not explicitly address such vast and death-dealing systems as patriarchy and white supremacy. And yet, as ecofeminist and ecowomanist scholars have urged us for decades, environmental sustainability and human flourishing is unthinkable apart from the naming and dismantling of these systems.

In this respect, while Francis's vision is inspiring and generative, it requires critical sharpening by activists and theologians who aim to express and enflesh

[1] Francis, encyclical letter *Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, §49 (italics in the original) .

an explicitly intersectional integral ecology.[2] Inspired by Kimberlé W. Crenshaw's understanding of intersectionality, this paper envisions an intersectional integral ecology in three brief movements. First, it analyzes Pope Francis's depiction of integral ecology in *Laudato Si'*, emphasizing its generativity as well as its limits. Next, it turns to the insights of Catholic ecofeminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, highlighting the ways in which her work has grappled with the necessary link between environmentalism and social justice decades before the publication of *Laudato Si'*.[3] Lastly, this paper argues that in order to be authentically integral, an ecological vision must be intersectional. It must promote the naming, dismantling, and transformation of particular systems–such as patriarchy, white supremacy, and classism–as they intersect and interact.



Presidential Office Building, Taiwan, CC BY 2.0, Wikimedia Commons.

[2] See Leah Thomas, *The Intersectional Environmentalist: How to Dismantle Systems of Oppression to Protect People + Planet* (New York: Voracious / Little, Brown and Company, 2022), 25. As we do this work, we must specifically lift up the contributions of Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, who developed the concept of intersectionality in 1989 (25). We must hold in mind Leah Thomas's insistence that "any advancement or more broad adoption of intersectional theory should start with the fact that it was bred from the Black experience and was developed as a tool to help Black women feel seen, heard, and validated in their everyday lives" (25).

[3] I first explored the concept of an intersectional integral ecology by placing Pope Francis's insights into conversation with Rosemary Radford Ruether's in *The Catholic Worker*. See Jim Robinson, "Rosemary Radford Ruether," *The Catholic Worker*, vol. XCI, no. 2, March-April 2023, pg. 4.

As we have seen, Pope Francis insists on the enmeshment of ecological degradation and social injustice throughout *Laudato Si'*. He observes that "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental."[4] He insists that "Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature."[5] Francis employs the term integral ecology throughout *Laudato Si'* in an effort to illuminate the complexity of our ecological and social crisis, as well as the holistic response that this crisis requires. He devotes an entire chapter, chapter four, titled "Integral Ecology," to exploring these themes. He opens this chapter with the following observation, "Since everything is closely interrelated, and today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an *integral ecology*, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions."[6] We can sense in this quote that the concept of integral ecology is intentionally capacious, as it is inspired by the ambitious aim of "taking into account every aspect of the global crisis."[7] We can furthermore sense that Francis's depiction of this concept is impressionistic rather than complete. He does not exhaustively delineate the concept. Instead, he identifies "some elements of an *integral ecology*."[8] The impressions that Francis provides suggest that, most basically, an integral ecology aims to hold together environmental and social realities.

Though the capacious nature of the concept of integral ecology could be conducive to a broad view of the roots of our eco-social crisis, the concept does run the risk of lingering in the realm of abstraction without theoretical clarification and practical application. In this respect, Pope Francis's depiction of an integral ecology is perhaps best viewed as a foundation to build upon, or soil to work with, rather than a fully fleshed out vision. Within the space of the encyclical, the meaning of the concept is gestured toward rather than firmly and fully expressed. Daniel P. Castillo aptly observes that though the "concept of integral ecology is at the center of Pope Francis's call for the renewal of our common home…this concept remains somewhat under-defined."[9] Castillo

[4] Francis, *Laudato Si',* §139.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., §137.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Daniel P. Castillo, "Integral Ecology as a Liberationist Concept," *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (May 12, 2016): 353, Sage Journals.

proposes that Francis "does not offer a clear definition of the term. As a result, the precise meaning of integral ecology remains somewhat elusive."[10]

Ultimately, Pope Francis's depiction of integral ecology leaves ample room for activists and theologians to build upon and evolve the concept, and such constructive work is vitally important. For instance, while Rosemary P. Carbine compellingly observes that Pope Francis "portrays our global environmental crises in similar ways to ecofeminist theologies," she also observes that *Laudato Si'* "fails to realize an integral ecology with respect to gender justice."[11] She therefore suggests the importance of turning to the witness of Catholic women who "engage in prophetic eco-activism that more fully realizes an integral ecology."[12] In this spirit, we will now turn to the work of Catholic scholar-activist Rosemary Radford Ruether, as we constructively build upon Pope Francis's vision of an integral ecology.

Throughout her academic career, Rosemary Radford Ruether's scholarship has always been inextricable from her embodied involvement in movements for social justice and ecological flourishing. Attentive to this pattern, Gary Dorrien aptly refers to Ruether as the "epitome of a scholar-activist" and emphasizes that every book Ruether wrote "had a community behind it," since she "forged friendships with activists in various fields and wrote books out of her activist commitments."[13] As Mary Joanne Henold has it, "in the sixties, Ruether became deeply involved in the civil rights and peace movements as well as the Catholic left" so that "while pursuing her academic career as a theologian, and raising her children in a racially integrated Washington neighborhood, she could frequently be found at demonstrations, on picket lines, and occasionally in jail."[14] Through her active involvement in justice movements, Ruether developed and articulated a multifaceted critique of the unjust systems which oppress and marginalize human beings while bringing about the ruin of the earth.

In *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (1981), Ruether argues that "social domination is the missing link in the question of domination of nature."[15] In this sentence, Ruether crystalizes an insight that is explored by

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[10] Ibid., 354.

[11] Rosemary P. Carbine, "Imagining and Incarnating an Integral Ecology: A Critical Ecofeminist Public Theology," in *Planetary Solidarity: Global Women's Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice,"* ed. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Hilda P. Koster (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 47; 56.

[12] Ibid., 58.

[13] Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity (1950-2005)* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 187.

[14] Mary Joanne Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 39-40.

[15] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 59.

Pope Francis in *Laudato Si,'* an insight that has been explored for decades now by countless scholars—including ecofeminists, ecowomanists, liberation theologians, and advocates of environmental justice—whose work emerges from a sensitivity to the intertwining of ecological degradation and social injustice. Even earlier, In *New Woman, New Earth*: *Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (1975), Ruether insists that "an ecological revolution must overthrow all the social structures of domination."[16] Throughout this text, Ruether analyzes and critiques the ways in which various systems–such as patriarchy, systemic racism, and classism–interact and intersect in bringing about eco-social ruin. She calls for a recognition of the "interstructuring of race, sex, and class."[17] Thinking of Ruether, Elina Vuola reflects on the "early inclusion of what is today called intersectionality" in the scholarship of first-generation feminist theologians.[18] Vuola specifically centers Ruether's *New Woman, New Earth* as an early text to consider that "gender should always be analyzed in relation to race and class."[19]

Simply put, Rosemary Radford Ruether has offered a robust analysis of the inextricable link between social injustice and environmental degradation decades before the publication of *Laudato Si'*. She developed and embodied this analysis throughout her career, in conversation with a wide web of scholars and activists working to move the world in the direction of sustainability and justice. As we build on Pope Francis's vision of integral ecology by integrating insights from Ruether, we might draw inspiration from her commitment to naming and resisting the impact and interaction of specific systems of domination, such as patriarchy, systemic racism, and classism. We might also draw inspiration from her commitment to fleshing out a liberating theology by drawing on her own experience as a scholar actively involved in movements for justice.

While engaging with the insights of Catholic theologians such as Ruether in order to evolve the concept of integral ecology, we might simultaneously turn toward the insights of a wider web of activists, theologians, and theorists. We might turn, for instance, to the work of Leah Thomas. In *The Intersectional Environmentalist: How to Dismantle Systems of Oppression to Protect People + Planet* (2022)*,* Thomas argues that intersectional environmentalism "advocates for the protection of both people and the planet" as it recognizes that the "same systems of oppression that oppress people also oppress and degrade the

[16] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 204.

[17] Ibid., 132.

[18] Elina Vuola, "Feminist Theology, Religious Studies and Gender Studies: Mutual Challenges," in *Contemporary Encounters in Gender and Religion: European Perspectives,* ed. Lena Gemzöe, Marja Liisa-Keinänen, and Avril Maddrell (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2016), 316.

[19] Ibid.

planet."[20] Thomas draws on the insights of ecofeminists as well as the history of environmental justice initiatives in fleshing out her call for an intersectional environmentalism. As we continue to expand on Pope Francis's vision of integral ecology through ongoing creative dialogue, we might reflect on how we can best enflesh an intersectional integral ecology in our scholarship and in our lives. In the process, may we always work to name, resist, and dismantle the death-dealing systems—such as patriarchy, white supremacy, and classism—which weigh so heavily on our world.

[20] Leah Thomas, *The Intersectional Environmentalist: How to Dismantle Systems of Oppression to Protect People + Planet* (New York: Voracious / Little, Brown and Company, 2022), 43-44.

ECOWOMANIST REFLECTIONS: DEEP SEEING BEAUTY AS EARTH

Melanie L. Harris

Ecowomanism begins with the contemplative step of noticing Earth, the Earth within ourselves, our sacred bodies, minds, and spirits—and also the sacredness of Earth in each other as interconnected beings. How we relate to Earth and to one another matters. So, the gleaning process for developing Earth-honoring faiths, ethical systems, and ecowomanist spiritual practices that honor Earth—and thus reshape our worldviews, cosmologies, and theologies—are important, and many times transformative.

Ecowomanism works to glean Earth wisdom for the sake of environmental justice by honoring the theories and methods of climate science research and by studying the spiritual practices and religious orientations of Indigenous women and women of African descent. Ecowomanism observes how these women understand climate justice work, strategize, and practice communal care to enhance environmental justice work globally. For example, consider the work of Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement, the ecowomanist writings of Alice Walker, or the intersectional environmentalism of Leah Thomas. The ethical models these and other women offer us through their life work and spiritual activism informs the work and practice of ecowomanism. Gleaning ways

of relating and working collaboratively, and studying the ways that collectives move mirrors the ways we notice ecosystems organize and relate to each other. This too is a part of the goal of ecowomanism–to shape Earth-honoring ethical ways of being that are highly relational, and that take seriously a recognition that Earth is sacred. Birthed through the awareness of our oneness and interbeing, ecowomanist scholarship is interdisciplinary. It crosses channels of theory, practice, environmental science, life work, scholarship, spirituality, religious orientation, collaborative leadership, and community organizing practiced by women of African descent together for the sake of Earth justice.

Photo by Andre Hunter on Unsplash

Key companions in a time of climate change include ecowomanist scholarship, conceptualization, and praxis that foregrounds the lives, voices, and perspectives of Indigenous women and women of African descent. This work also weaves together the art of contemplative noticing, intersectional analysis, climate science, and ecowomanist methods in ways that invite vital conversations in religion and ecology, and specifically Christian environmental ethics.

Foregrounding the voices of women of color, Indigenous women, and women of African descent is a key part of ecowomanism. This inherently brings a corrective lens to the normative claims and categories used within environmental ethics that tend to silence women of color and the impact that climate injustice has on their bodies, minds, spirits, communities, and connections with Earth. All

beings carry the sacredness of Earth within them, and this principle is expressed through a number of Indigenous religions and spiritualities. As an approach to environmental ethics that applies anti-racist, anti-colonial lenses, non-hierarchical and non-dual and interreligious approaches, ecowomanist theory and praxis is liberating. It points to the freedom of all beings from the impact of environmental degradation, exploitative practices against Earth, and theories that negate the worth and value of living beings. Rather, ecowomanism points to ways of knowing that celebrate connection, promote understanding within the web of biodiversity, and slow us down long enough to notice spiritualities and religious orientations that, together with scientific research, help provide guidance on how to live justly in a time of climate change.

By recognizing the wisdom of Earth embedded within the spiritual and religious practices of many Indigenous women and women of African descent, as they honor their eco-memory and Earth experiences, we see more clearly a path into the first step of ecowomanist method–to honor experience. This method consists of seven steps, namely: 1) honoring experience and eco-memory, 2) critical reflection on experience and eco-memory, 3) conducting womanist intersectional analysis, 4) critically examining African and African American history and tradition, 5) engaging transformation, 6) sharing dialogue, and 7) taking action for Earth justice.

For the field of religion and ecology, ecowomanism is a breath of fresh air. It interrupts the normative categories of Christian environmental ethics, specifically by shaking up hierarchical patterns and constructing new methods and non-dual approaches that invite a plethora of approaches to climate justice. Noting the silencing of women–and especially women of African descent–ecowomanism insists on intersectional analysis in its method. That is, in addition to using a race-class-gender analytical lens when examining examples of environmental racism, ecowomanist intersectional analysis incorporates a climate justice lens that includes exploration into the root causes of ecocide and ecological suffering. It critiques the logics of domination that can show up through practices of white supremacy and hinder the work of Earth justice, even as we strive to come together cross-culturally and interracially to practice environmental justice. If, for example, most of the scholars writing about Christian environmental ethics are white, Christian, cis-gendered men emerging from a particular school of thought, and seeking even if unconsciously to protect the racial, cultural, and gender privilege of their voices in the field, then the future of the field of religion and ecology will likely look the same as it has in the past.

Ecowomanism interrupts this with a spirit of fierce compassion, recalling the words of Audre Lorde, that "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's

house."[1] In an age of anthropocentrism, wherein violence is used as a tool of oppression and religious ideas reinforce hierarchies, ecowomanism stands and speaks boldly, calling for these practices to be shed for the sake of Earth justice and social justice. Instead, we must take up collaborative tools to recast a vision for ecological and racial reparations. We must act on this vision so that through this blessed work can emerge a sense of living justly in Earth community, with freedom and ecological hope becoming possible.

[1] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 110.

REFLECTIONS ON RELIGION AND ECOLOGY: TROUBLES, CONFERENCES, EDUCATION

Christopher Key Chapple

This brief essay will touch on three aspects of the current ecological dilemma, followed by reflections on two conferences that I attended and on the ongoing important role of education.

Troubles

Three topics have entered the sphere of public and scientific conversation: climate change, the ubiquity of plastics, and diminution of species diversity.

Climate change has now become part of the warp and woof of policy, technological advances, and economic innovation. Germany and California have become leaders in the generation of solar energy. Electric automobiles, once shunned, have become commonplace. Though not fast enough, the rate of the increase in emissions has been reduced and is expected to plateau and decline.

Plastics suffuse the planet from the Arctic, to the oceans, to the blood flowing through humans and other animals. Unknowns abound. Do microplastics affect

cancer rates? Do endocrine imitators—which alter the genitalia of frogs who swim in heavily plasticized waters—have a parallel effect on humans?

The weight and mass of farm animals and human bodies exponentially exceed the weight and mass of free-range non-domesticated mammals, reptiles, and birds.[1] Aside from rare shark and bear attacks and the hundreds of deaths each year from tigers and elephants in India, humans have fulfilled the biblical injunction to gain dominion. Fear of wild animals has been replaced with other forms of human fear manifested in anxiety and depression.

How can ethical and spiritual discourse contribute to relieving the amalgam of malaise delineated above? Most humans share concern for the common good obtained through long life and good health despite the rise of clannish identitarianism, various forms of xenophobia, and seeming disengagement from political life due to disaffection. Religious authorities decry human sin as the origin of all woes—greed, covetousness, deceit, calumny, hypocrisy—calling for personal and social change. Fiction writers, journalists, and filmmakers call attention to situations and scenarios in ways that move the human heart. Politicians grapple with creating effective legislation to address systemic issues. Scientists work to develop replacement and remediation technologies that address the myriad ecological challenges that abound.

Conferences

At the May 2024 conference of the European Forum for the Study of Religion and the Environment, several scholars gathered in Potsdam to share their thoughts, research, and accomplishments on behalf of Planet Earth. Inspiring stories were shared about mountains saved from mining in the Hebrides and in the Colorado Rockies. Philosophically, the assembly celebrated the shift toward a movement variously characterized as the new materialism, new immanentism, and new animism, heralding the dawning realization of interconnectivity and the rejuvenation of systems thought. The implications are immense. Naïve mechanistic assumptions have been overthrown by keystone thinkers. Policy changes will follow.

At the June 2024 Berggruen Institute gathering on Planetary Metaphysics, convened by Boris Shoshitaishvili in Venice, scholars from various disciplines explored three intersecting topics: Gaia, the Noosphere, and the Anthropocene. Gaia theory builds on the work of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, who established that living systems on Earth were made possible by a reciprocity between microbes, atmosphere, and rocks. Bacteria digesting minerals released

[1] "Mass of Humans, Livestock, and Wild Mammals: A Stunning Comparison," *Yale E360*, https://e360.yale.edu/digest/mass-of-humans-livestock-wild-mammals.

oxygen and nitrogen upward and excreted limestone downward. The Noosphere, theorized by the Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, celebrates human consciousness as a culmination of the Earth making sense of itself. The idea of the Anthropocene bleakly announces that the rise of human-generated technologies has altered the stuff of the planet leading to alteration of landscapes, inner and outer. A call-to-action results: how will humans respond to the realities of climate change, pollution, and loss of the psychic and physical benefits of other-than-human species?

Photo by Jens Aber on Unsplash

Education

Education holds the key to bringing needed change. Throughout the Catholic milieu of 1.5 billion souls, *Laudato Si'* offers a roadmap toward healing the planet through its combination of economic analysis and ethical exhortation. Similar

proclamations, spreading the news of difficulty and urging prudence regarding the use of natural resources, have been issued by leaders of other faith traditions.

For more than four decades, I have been teaching and publishing within the field of religion and ecology. My methodology includes student immersion in local environments. This includes learning about local flora and fauna and the stories of first peoples, as well as beach cleanups and chapparal restoration. In addition to *Laudato Si'*, we also study the many potential ecological insights found in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions. We move and we meditate as part of the curriculum.

Sometimes we teachers hear from students how their education has shaped and formed their life work. Connor de Vane, who completed my class on World Religions and Ecology in 2016, took a gap year after graduating from Loyola Marymount University to walk the continental divide from Canada to Mexico. He made a film called *Hike the Divide*, documenting his discoveries and conversations with ecological activists from Montana to New Mexico. Subsequently, he continued to engage the Great Work imaginatively, as shared in this message from February 12, 2024:

> I am working on a just transition for Indigenous and immigrant farmworkers out of the wine industry into climate resilience work and care for the land (prescribed fire, ecologically sound forestry, watershed regeneration, habitat restoration, etc.) through the grassroots labor coalition I work with, North Bay Jobs with Justice, and the New Orleans based nonprofit Resilience Force. Lots of exciting stuff in the works! I wrote two successful grant proposals this fall to CAL FIRE and the Labor and Workforce Development Agency for just shy of $1.9 million to support the training and employment of workers at family-sustaining wages of at least $35/hr.

Such work gives me hope for the future!

In fall 2024 I taught a class and required the reading of two books: Carl Safina's *Alfie and Me: What Animals Know, What Humans Believe* (Abe Books, 2023) and Roseanna Xia's *California Against the Sea: Visions for Our Vanishing Coastline* (Heyday Books, 2023). In *Alfie and Me*, a screech owl named Alfie was rescued by Carl and his wife Patricia, hand-reared during the pandemic, and successfully released into the wild. The authors give point and counterpoint conversations regarding the history of world culture, contrasting what Thomas Berry characterized as the life-denying "collection of objects" worldview with the life-affirming "communion of subjects" worldview. We connected with our on-campus naturalist to spend time with the owls that nest near the Loyola

Marymount (LMU) bell tower. We will also learned about connecting with nature at the Ballona Wetlands, a six-hundred-acre state ecological preserve adjacent to LMU–the last remaining wild coastal remnant in Los Angeles County, which is being restored. In the second, Xia describes many other beach communities. She does not, however, cover the amazing story of how forty-eight nonprofit organizations banded and bonded to successfully spare the Balloona Wetlands from a city council-approved plan for a seaside golf course and marina, a story researched and written by students in the class.

Education elevates and liberates. Through tools of discernment, everyday decisions can be oriented toward the greater good. To do so requires hard work and the cultivation of independent thinking and personal power, as seen in this quote by Howard Thurman (1899-1981) delivered at the 1980 Spelman College commencement following his experience studying and consulting with Mahatma Gandhi and Gandhian leaders in India from 1935-36:

> There is something in every one of you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. It is the only true guide you will ever have. And if you cannot hear it, you will, all of your life, spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls.[2]

[2] Howard Thurman, "The Sound of the Genuine," Baccalaureate Address, Spelman College, May 4, 1980. Text edited by Jo Moore Stewart, *Spelman Messenger* 96, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 14–15.

LIVELY RELIGIOUS ECOLOGY IN HIGHLAND ASIA

Dan Smyer Yü

Photo by Dan Smyer Yü

Writing as one of the initial seed-sowers of religion and ecology in Asia, my story of the spread and indigenization of this interdisciplinary field began with Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim two decades ago in the manner of brainstorming, interdisciplinary conferences, summer schools, and publishing workshops for graduate students and early-career scholars. The journey began in the heart of China but the flourishing of the version I have been promoting is mostly taking place in the greater Himalayan borderlands of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Southwest China, and the Tibetan Plateau. I often call this multi-ethnolinguistic and multistate borderland the "trans-Himalayan region" (Smyer Yü and Michaud 2017). Here, this Asian incarnation of religion and ecology is grounded in the region's diverse ecological contexts and spiritual traditions. It retains much of the original ethos of Tucker and Grim shown in the series of conferences on religions of the world and ecology at the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions launched in 1996, marking the inaugural year of this growing field. At the same time, its indigenization in the Asian highlands has its own evolution—of different phases, colors, shapes, and future aspirations. Let me tell the story.

Originating in North America, the spread of religion and ecology to China was marked by the Chinese translations of *Confucianism and Ecology: The*

Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans (Tucker and Berthrong 1998) and *Daoism and Ecology: Ways within A Cosmic Landscape* (Girardot et al. 2001). Peng Guoxiang of Peking University and Chen Xia of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences respectively translated them in 2008. The wider indigenization of religion and ecology in Asia took place in 2010 when Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and I began to co-organize a conference, thematized as "Religious Diversity and Ecological Sustainability in China." The effort was supported by the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, Minzu University of China, and the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. It was hosted at Minzu University of China, Beijing, in 2012. Given our respective specializations in Confucianism, Indigenous spiritual ecologies, and Asian Buddhist and Indigenous traditions, "China," as it was framed in the conference, was recognized as an inter-Asian China, signifying that the imperial history of the nation subsequently shaped its current ethnocultural diversity and multinational borderlands. The cultural and scholarly backgrounds of the invited participants from over forty-five ethnic and national backgrounds reflected this inter-Asian diversity. The outcomes of the conference were published in both English and Chinese languages (Miller, Smyer Yü, and van der Veer 2014; Su and Smyer Yü 2013). They bore what I called a "Tucker and Grim characteristic" (Smyer Yü 2014) demonstrated by their urgent call for building alliances between religion and ecology in the broadest sense, and for diverse spiritual understandings of the ecological Earth. The two multi-authored publications became textbooks and research references in China and neighboring countries such as Japan and South Korea.

The ending of this publishing project was the beginning of a new phase, as I continued to co-expand the field of religion and ecology with Asia-based peer scholars. Given my expertise in modern Himalayan-Tibetan studies, it was inevitable that this new phase of religion and ecology would be mostly situated in the Tibetan Plateau, the eastern Himalayan borderlands, and the hilly-riverine areas of Yunnan and Myanmar. At these higher elevations, the mountains, plateaus, and water bodies annually hum with the monsoon. This contributes to local weather events and to global climatic patternings. Here we find various forms of Indigenous animisms alive on their own or under the banner of world religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. This new phase began to unveil a trans-Himalayan face of religion and ecology. It is characteristically Indigenous-centered but globally engaged and explores feasible ways and means to translate diverse local ecospiritual knowledge from Asia's Global South into interdisciplinary and policy languages accessible and intelligible for a greater audience.

Photo by Dan Smyer Yü

The alliance of modern science and traditional environmental knowledge became a priority on my collaborative agenda with regional peer scholars, scientists, conservation specialists, and policymakers. These include Ambika Aiyadurai of Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar, Ming He of Yunnan University, Iftekhar Iqbal of Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Yunxia Li of Yunnan Minzu University, Joy L.K. Pachuau of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Arupjyoti Sakia of Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, Faxiang Su of Minzu University of China, Chi Huyen Truong of the Himalayan University Consortium, and Jelle Wouters of Royal Thimphu College. In many ways, we were answering Robin Wall Kimmerer's call, largely situated in the field of the environmental humanities, for the interweaving of Indigenous knowledges with those of modern science (Kimmerer 2013). We were becoming keenly aware of the interdisciplinary benefits of building an alliance of religion and ecology with the environmental humanities as an effective way of conveying invaluable Indigenous knowledge for global endeavors to forge new environmental ethics in the Anthropocene and build sustainable futures.

In 2015 and 2016, the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology generously offered help to co-organize annual summer schools for graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and early-career scholars from Asia and around the world. They

were hosted by the Center for Trans-Himalayan Studies at Yunnan Minzu University. The courses, discussion sessions, and assignments were interdisciplinarily- and publicly-engaged as well as action-packed. The collective action of the participants was to make two translated volumes as textbooks of religion and ecology and of multidisciplinary environmental studies with a trans-Himalayan theme (Smyer Yü et al. 2017a; Smyer Yü et al. 2017b).

The publications revealed to us the developmental problems of coordinating religion and ecology and the environmental humanities. The former emphasizes individual religions' ecological experiences and knowledge mostly framed in religious studies that set boundaries between individual religious traditions and that do not yet prioritize the urgency of making religious ecological knowledge more accessible across the sciences and humanities. The latter is commonly identified with its low enthusiasm for religious ecologies. With this keen awareness, for the following years, we were compelled to find common ground between religious ecology and the environmental humanities. The Himalayan University Consortium (https://huc-hkh.org/) came to our aid by supporting resilience-building workshops for local students and scholars in the Himalayan region. The outcomes of these gatherings were published as edited volumes and have been built into the curricula of participating scholars. During the pandemic years, we continued our collaborative research and publishing endeavors for solidifying the needed alliance between the two growing fields. Our collective efforts have comfortably allowed us to be simultaneously religious ecologists and environmental humanists or to be ecospiritual humanists who synergize the two fields into one. It pays off when we embrace both interdisciplines as a synergetic union.

From 2021 to 2024, we published more research-based, collaborative books and journal articles. In particular, published in the Routledge Environmental Humanities Series, *Environmental Humanities in the New Himalayas: Symbiotic Indigeneity, Commoning, Sustainability* (Smyer Yü and de Maaker 2021); *Storying Multipolar Climes of the Himalaya, Andes and Arctic: Anthropocenic Climate and Shapeshifting Watery Lifeworlds* (Smyer Yü and Wouters 2023); and *Himalayan Climes and Multispecies Encounters* (Wouters and Smyer Yü 2024). These works are representative of our intent to blur the boundaries of the two fields. We thus shapeshift our interdisciplinary identities between the religious ecologist and the environmental humanist. We fundamentally see everything and everyone on Earth as an inherent part of what many scientists call the "living matter" of the geological forces that afford us to be "walking, talking minerals" (Vernadski 1998; Margulis and Sagan 1995), embodied with spiritual aspirations and material realities. What is animate is material and vice versa; what is sacred is ecological and vice versa; and what is transcendent is this-worldly and vice versa. The Earth makes the ecological

symbiosis of lifeworlds possible. Thus, we find spiritual transcendence in the horizontal connectivity of life rather than in a vertical relation to an other-worldly, non-ecological entity.

In sum, the contributions of trans-Himalayan religion and ecology are primarily found in the interdisciplinary conceptualizations of what we call the "Earth's innate freedom," "the Earth's environmental commoning," "the affective consciousness of the Earth," "symbiotic indigeneity," "nonhuman indigeneity," and "indigenous climes" elaborated in the individual chapters of the abovementioned books. The efficacy of these emerging conceptual vehicles in our texts is found in their interdisciplinary- and policy-translatability and the public-accessibility of faith-based ecological knowledge. Our lived experiences as natives and our research activities as scientists in the vast landscapes of the greater Himalayan-Tibetan highlands allow us to feel, sense, and reflect on the greatness of the Earth in both spiritually sublime and geologically inspiring ways. We are thus attentively storying the awe-inspiring power of the Earth's own environmental freedom and geo-ecological commoning that makes continents, shapes mountains, creates water bodies, and sustains the livingness of matter in every life. Recognizing the spiritual and physical facts of being ensouled by the Earth, embodied with the lively minerals of the Earth, and pulsing with the Earth's geophysiological movements, we feel called to continue the journey of religion and ecology with a variety of humanistic approaches.

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MOUNT KANCHENJUNGA AS ELDEST BROTHER AND PROTECTOR OF SIKKIM DARJEELING HIMALAYA

Charisma K. Lepcha

Rong religion has been of interest to colonial administrators, ethnographers, and anthropologists ever since they set foot in the Sikkim and Darjeeling Himalaya. Upon arrival in these borderlands, they were surprised to find a group of people who did not practice either Buddhism or Hinduism–the world religions with which they were familiar. The religion of the Indigenous people was seen to be confusing, "contradictory,"[1] "double-layered,"[2] "atheistic,"[3] and there was "nothing spiritual"[4] about it. Most of these scholars were not able to understand or fathom the religious moorings of the community

[1] Gorer was one of the first anthropologists to study the Rong people in the 1930s. He found their religion to be complicated as they practised simultaneously two "contradictory" religions. See Geoffrey Gorer, *The Lepchas of Sikkim* (Delhi: Cultural Publishing House, 1984), 181.

[2] Davide Torri, "In the Shadow of the Devil" in *Health and Religious Rituals in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2010), 148.

[3] Herbert Hope Risley, *The Gazetteer of Sikkim* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1894).

[4] John Morris, *Living with the Lepchas* (London: William Heinemann, 1938), 287.

of people who traced a mountain as their place of origin and shared kin relations with the stones and the trees.

The Rongs are the Indigenous people of Sikkim and Darjeeling Himalaya who believe their creator God, *Itbudebu Rum*, made the first man and woman from the snow of Mt. Kanchenjunga (*Kongchen Konghlo*), their sacred place of origin. The Rong country is called *Mayel Lyang*, which today stretches across Sikkim, Darjeeling, and Kalimpong in India, southwest Bhutan, and eastern Nepal. They call themselves Rong from *Rongkup*/*Rumkup,* which means "children of snowy peak"/"children of God," identifying themselves as the offspring of both nature and God. The popularly used *Lepcha* nomenclature to identify the community is an exonym with derogatory connotations; hence, the original term "Rong" will be used in this article.

The Rong religion is called *Mun-Bongthing,* also known as Munism and Bongthingism, deriving its name from the female and male ritual specialists who act as mediators between gods, humans, and spirits. They are seen as powerful shamans and are required to officiate the different rites of passage. Early anthropologists mention "munism" or the "mun religion" in their writings, distinguishing the Indigenous religion from Buddhism, reflecting how our idea of religion is most often shaped by the contemporary understanding of world religions. The colonial conception of religion, therefore, did not fit the Rong belief system since, like other Indigenous people around the world, they did not have a word for "religion" per se. The closest description of their religion from one of the early colonial texts suggests that "though outwardly professing Buddhism, they are at heart confirmed animists, worshipping the spirits of mountain, forest, and river.'"[5]

Rong cosmology is in fact filled with "reverence for nature, ancestral spirits, and sacred landscapes."[6] Interestingly, both Buddhism and Christianity had already seeped into Rong society by the time Rong people began to be studied. The Buddhist missionaries from Tibet and the Christian missionaries from Scotland[7] had already introduced Buddhism and Christianity as the acceptance of these two religions led to the creation of Buddhist Lepcha and Christian Lepcha identities fracturing the community along religious lines. Rong religious scholarship then flourished by examining the influence of these world religions on traditional lifeways, though it was limited to religious identity and social cultural change.

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[5] David McDonald, *Touring in Sikkim and Tibet* (Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1930), 8.

[6] Robin Wright, "Indigenous Religious Traditions," in Lawrence Sullivan, ed., *Religions of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 31-50.

[7] Charisma K. Lepcha, "The Scottish Mission in Kalimpong," in Markus Viehbeck, ed., *Transcultural Encounters in the Himalayan Borderlands* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2017), 73.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in Rong religion and its relation to the environment. Such studies are a departure from earlier religious perspectives and make an attempt to understand the Indigenous religion in its own terms. The consciousness perhaps began in 2007, when Rong activists protested against hydropower projects[8] in their "ancestral land"/"holy land." Of the twenty-six dams to be constructed in Sikkim, six were proposed inside Dzongu—the protective "reserve" set aside for the Indigenous Rongs since the time of the King.[9] The royal notification in 1958 forbade "outsiders" from entry and residence in the culturally homogenous Rong reserve. Because of its special status, Dzongu has often been the homeland for Rongs around the world. With the emergence of dams, their existence felt threatened as they began articulating the religio-cultural connections to the land drawn from a rich history and lifeways embedded in the landscape. Dzongu was indeed the last bastion of Rong culture and was seen as a "living entity."[10] It is believed that the creator sent the first couple, Fudongthing and Nazongnyoo, to live in Dzongu, and it is known as

Photo by Amitabha Gupta, CC By 4.0, Wikimedia Commons

fokram takram–meaning the source of Rong origin and life. In that, Dzongu holds a past, present, and future, with a "consciousness and a will toward life"[11]

[8] In 2006, as part of the government of India's Mega Power policy, hydropower projects opened up to the private sector, reaching Sikkim along with the rest of Northeast India.

[9] Beginning in 1642, Sikkim was ruled by the Namgyal dynasty before it became part of India in 1975.

[10] Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal View of Landscape and Wilderness* (Canberra, Australian Heritage Commission, 1996), 8.

[11] Ibid, 7.

and the dam activists defended their sacred geography. "We want our sacred, holy, ancestral land, Dzongu, where the souls of our ancestors rest to be left alone" read one of the flyers during a hunger strike in 2007.

At that time, nobody paid heed to their words and their struggle. After all, they were just a handful of Rong youth from the reserve area who probably did not know what they were doing, as the state labelled them "anti-Sikkimese." Sikkim is the second smallest state in India with a population of only six hundred thousand, and protests against dams by a micro-minority community was negligible. But the youth persisted. Their indefinite hunger strike went on for over nine hundred days as four out of six projects were scrapped, and they became the voice of conscious resistance. Though their cries were related to the sacredness of the landscape and the defense of their ancestral memories, the uphill battle had given birth to Indigenous environmentalism in a rather unexpected manner. During the early days of protests, people were surprised that the Rong activists chose to highlight the religio-cultural reasons to oppose hydroelectric projects. It seemed distant from the environmental focus most dam activists across India were advocating. Little did people understand that the environmental wisdom was embedded in their cultural lifeways, as the interaction with "biodiversity and local bioregions" was integrated into everyday life."[12] In that, the transformation of Dzongu from "homeland" to "holy land" was living proof that religion and ecology had reclaimed the Rong worldview for the entire community.

Rong religion has mostly been studied under the shadow of Buddhism, and the landscape is often viewed from the Buddhist perspective. For instance, Mt. Kanchenjunga, the origin mountain for Rong people, has been appropriated by Buddhism and made into the guardian deity, as Kanchenjunga is revered as the guardian deity of Sikkim even today. For the Rong people, Kanchenjunga reflects their sacred origin—a history that took place in a fabled primordial time of the "beginnings."[13] It is believed that when the Himalayas were created, Kanchenjunga was the first creation and is revered as the eldest brother–*Anum Timbu*. The acknowledgement of Kanchenjunga as *Anum Timbu* tells us of the human and nonhuman kin relations with the mountain. There is a reciprocal relationship in which the eldest brother protects the younger siblings as they bestow respect on him.

Reverence for Kanchenjunga is also evident in the evocation of the mountain to begin different rituals in the community. Ritual specialists always start their incantations by calling upon Kanchenjunga in traditions such as *Chyu Rum Faat,*

[12] John A. Grim, "Recovering Religious Ecology with Indigenous Traditions" in *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology*, ed. John A. Grim (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[13] Mircea Eliade, "Archaic Myths and Historical Man," (typescript and offprint, undated), 60-70.

a ritual observed for the worship of the mountain. During this ritual, stones are erected in twos and threes, with the largest stone representing Mt. Kanchenjunga. The centrality of this mountain in the Rong worldview is apparent in the residential pattern of the community, as people ensure they can see the mountain from where they live. The snow melt that turns into rivers and streams reveals their dependence on the mountain for their sustenance and livelihood.[14] Even at death, Kanchenjunga stands tall, since in Rong cosmology, when someone dies, the soul returns to their mountain of origin. Thus, the veneration of the guardian deity of Sikkim has deep roots in the Rong belief system.

In October 2023, Sikkim witnessed a devastating glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) along with incessant rain, floods, and landslides. This GLOF destroyed the biggest hydropower project in Sikkim, killing over forty people and ruining hundreds of homes and livelihoods downstream. Indeed, the mountains and rivers of this region have been heavily impacted by anthropogenic climate crises. Newspaper editorials and journalists started reaching out to Rong activists to hear their perspectives as their protests against dams from almost fifteen years ago were being recalled, and the Indigenous knowledge of climate change was being acknowledged. The Rongs respect and revere the environment they live in. They place value in kinship obligations—as we have seen with the eldest brother—and share a reciprocal relationship between humans and non-humans. If they fail to recognize this relationship, they believe there may be consequences.

Few Rong scholars have advocated a thorough study of Rong folk tales to understand their religious beliefs. Many of these tales revolve around nature and various interactions with supernatural beings. In this light, I return to the creation story in which the eldest brother *Kongchen Konghlo* was created. At that time, *matli pano* or the earthquake king was also created. But the world was filled with water, so *Itbudebu Rum* created soil/earth on *matli pano*'s body so different beings could inhabit the Earth. But the earthquake king was not happy and would often shake causing floods and earthquakes. In order to control the earthquake king, Kongchen Konghlo was placed on his chest so the eldest brother could control and protect everyone from the rage of the earthquake. This story underscores the importance of relational bonds and the role of the eldest brother in protecting the environment of Sikkim Himalaya. While Mt. Kanchenjunga serves as a protector deity[15] today, the Indigenous Rong belief system has long been aware of the "relationship of material, semiotic and spiritual life,"[16] as seen

[14] Charisma K. Lepcha, "Lepcha water view and climate change in Sikkim Himalaya" in *The New Himalayas: Symbiotic Indigeneity, Commoning Sustainability,* ed. Dan Smyer Yü and Erik de Maaker (London: Routledge, 2021), 43.

[15] Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia, "Living with the Mountain: Mountain Propitiation Rituals in the Making of Human-Environmental Ethics in Sikkim," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* (2021): 261-294.

[16] John A. Grim, "Indigenous Lifeways and Ecology," 2019.

by the eldest brother protecting both the human and nonhuman beings of the land.

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THE HAUDENOSAUNEE (IROQUOIS) GREAT BINDING PEACE

Philip P. Arnold and Sandra L. Bigtree

What kind of worldview or religious orientation does it take to make an entire planet uninhabitable? While many think it is our dependence on fossil fuels and the population explosion that has brought us to this point of human destruction, our contention is that these problems have religious foundations which were created and continue to be used by empires as a means to hold dominion over people and the Earth. Opposition to this path of self-destruction is something Indigenous Peoples have been trying to communicate since first contact, to not jeopardize their traditions of regenerative reciprocity which had thrived for tens of thousands of years.

We are very fortunate to live in the lands of the Onondaga Nation. Against all odds, they have retained their precolonial matrilineal clan-based form of democracy, which since its inception at Onondaga Lake, has operated for thousands of years, continuing through today under the Great Binding Peace.[1] It is with the Onondaga Nation's perseverance in keeping these traditions alive, and having upheld their position as Firekeepers (the Central Fire or capital) of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy over several centuries, that we are now able to collaborate at the site where the Great Binding Peace was founded, and share these ancient protocols. We hope to reverse the destructive path on which we currently find ourselves. In 2012, our collaborative efforts helped create the

[1] Although this is most often referred to as "The Great Law of Peace," recent reflections on this English translation have made several to reconsider the use of the word "law" because historically that has been used to regulate behavior. "Binding" imparts a better sense of the reciprocal inclusivity of this Indigenous protocol of democracy with the natural world.

Skä·noñh - Great Law of Peace Center.[2] This educational center is located on Onondaga Lake near present day Syracuse, New York, and tells the story of the founding of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Skä·noñh means 'peace,' but as Tadodaho Sid Hill more profoundly explains, peace can only be obtained when human beings are in proper relationship with the natural world—inclusive of human and non-human beings.

The Creator's original instructions were delivered by the Peacemaker and presented to Jikonhsaseh who, with the help of forest beings, established the matrilineal clan system; Hiawatha, who through the process of condoled grief, regained his clear mind; and Tadodaho, the most wicked of all, was persuaded by five united nations to accept the peace—his title[3] would come to represent and oversee all beings. This established the Great Binding Peace. The Onondaga Nation is the capital, or "Central Fire," of what is now a six-nation confederacy (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Tuscarora, and Seneca) and where the Grand Council meets. Matrilineal clans are overseen by titled clan-mothers who determine which male will best represent their clan family. These titles are non-hierarchical and come with a lifetime assignment, unless the Clan Mother determines the clan is threatened. The men and women are called "loyani," which loosely translates to those of the "good mind." The Haudenosaunee inherit the clan of their mother, and this establishes their matrilineal clan relationship with the natural world.

The Great Binding Peace, representative of this ancient Longhouse tradition, has survived through the incursions of European and American colonial assaults on their identity, land, and culture, with Christianity used as justification. Of the 574 Native American "tribal nations" currently recognized by the US federal government, there are only a handful that still govern themselves independent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).[4] Of these few nations outside the BIA, three are from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy—Onondaga, Tuscarora, and Tonawanda Seneca. They have retained their precolonial sovereign status and still abide by the Great Binding Peace, or "Longhouse" tradition of clan representation with the natural world. Today, Longhouse Clan title holders travel

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[2] See Philip Arnold, *The Urgency of Indigenous Values* (Syracuse University Press, 2023) for an in-depth look at the ways that we formed the collaborative Two Row Wampum method in the development of the Skä·noñh - Great Law of Peace Center.

[3] ["Tadodaho"] has come to refer to the chief who chairs the council of Onondaga. Wikipedia contributors, "Tadodaho," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia,* https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tadodaho&oldid=1253505340

[4] This was a tactic of the United States to use Christian Indians who had gone through the forced assimilation of the boarding school system in the 19th century to create puppet governments of the United States so Indian lands and resources could be better managed based on colonial standards.

internationally on their own passports. They are as deeply committed today, as they have been for millennia to Skä·noñh—a peace established through building proper relationships with each other and the natural world.

Photo by William Alexander Drennan, Iroquois, 1914, Wikimedia Commons.

Historically, Haudenosaunee male and female clan "loyani" interacted regularly with colonists, including meetings in the 18th century in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and Albany, New York. They instructed early British colonists who later became the Founding Fathers of US democracy in diplomacy around the Great Binding Peace.[5] They exchanged wampum belts of peace to help illustrate the inherent equity that exists between human beings and their non-human relatives. The Founding Fathers were unable to fully comprehend these teachings, and they took whatever could be applied to ensure that patriarchal interests were not diminished in controlling the land and its inhabitants. Most obviously overlooked in considering peace was the centrality of women and that Skä·noñh requires proper relationships with the natural world.

The Founding Fathers came to this country with deeply imbedded British colonial ideologies that emanated from 15th century Papal Bulls called the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. These dogmas set Christian superiority above all Indigenous traditions with labels like "barbarians," "savages," "Saracens," "pagans," and "enemies of Christ." The Vatican distributed these directives to Christian kingdoms like Portugal and Spain to explore and to seize all lands, bodies, and worldly goods of Indigenous peoples around the world with the purpose of establishing Christendom—thus, continuing the Crusades to reconquer the Holy Land.

Cultures and lands were devastated by Christian raiders looking for gold and silver to fund these exploits. In the 17th century the emphasis was on colonialism and the commodification of crops like tobacco, sugar, tea, coffee, and so on. In the 19th century, the Doctrine of Christian Discovery was brought into US

[5] Bruce Johansen. 1998. *Debating Democracy;* José Barreiro, ed. 1992. *Indian Roots of American Democracy*. The role of the Haudenosaunee in the development of Western Democracy has been formally acknowledged by Congress H.Con.Res.331 — 100th Congress (1987-1988).

property law through the Supreme Court.[6] The Christian doctrine of domination has been consistently behind the devastation of Indigenous peoples and their lands. It undergirds our current existential crisis by disrupting our relationship with the natural world and it has led to our current spiritual malaise.[7]

The Haudenosaunee, along with all other Indigenous peoples, have warned settler-colonial people about their values which are leading to our own destruction. As Onondaga Nation Faithkeeper, Oren Lyons says, the Earth is not dying. It will be fine without human beings and will recover very quickly without us. We are actually working on our own destruction by making Mother Earth uninhabitable.

In consultation with the Onondaga Nation leadership the Skä·noñh - Great Law of Peace Center was created to impart the values of the Great Binding Peace. It is important that our visitors learn this essential protocol of peace, but we feel it equally important to address the problems that came with the early colonial invasion into these lands, with the intention to destroy this way to peace. This message is not a new one. It has been repeatedly discussed with the Founding Fathers and their successors. Now it is time for human beings to rededicate ourselves to hearing the message of the Peacemaker and embrace the fact that peace cannot be attained without being in proper relationship with all living beings (human and otherwise) in this regenerative world. Our survival depends on it.

In 1991, "Value Change for Survival" was the phrase that summarized the work of the United Nations' Global Forum of Spiritual Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival. The Indigenous Peoples were represented by Oren Lyons and his message amplified the Great Binding Peace. Healing the rift between human beings and the natural world will only occur with a religious recalibration that will orient us towards the myriad life upon which humankind depends. We suggest the model of the Great Binding Peace would be a good place to start.

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[6] US Supreme Court case, *Johnson v. M'Intosh* 21 U.S. 543 (1823).

[7] See Bigtree, S. and Arnold, P., "Forming a 'More Perfect Union' through Indigenous Values." *Orion Magazine*, August 12, 2020, https://orionmagazine.org/article/forming-a-more-perfect-union-through-indigenous-values/.

RECOVERING KINSHIP: THE NEW ANIMISM

Graham Harvey

Some words work really hard. This can be rewarding for both the words and their speakers, hearers, readers, users, and recipients. "Animism" (the word) does a lot of work because it carries a range of associations, some of which need to be teased out and others that must be strongly challenged. It is, in other words, deployed in strongly oppositional discourses. That's often the way with critical terms—as it is with slogans. So here I offer a reflection on the still evolving use of "animism" as a debated critical term.

Animism (the phenomena so labelled by the term's proponents and opponents) is not new. Animists (of different kinds) are found in many eras and places. Whether such identifications are correct, useful or respectful is at the heart of many disagreements about "old" and "new" approaches to animism. What is new in the "new animism" is an approach to phenomena and people. This approach takes seriously the world-making epistemologies and/or ontologies of the people who *might* be labelled "animists." It entails considering whether labelling people as animists enables or disables attention to what is important to them *and* provocative of critical debate about matters of wider concern. Among those debates and concerns are questions about putative resonances between animism and some traditions and projects of ecological practice.

Of similar importance to worrying about the word "new" (and, of course, "old", to which we'll return) is recognition that for many people who are called animists by scholars or other interested parties, "animist" is not a self-

designation. It is not a name many so-called animists use about themselves. When I asked Linda Hogan (Chickasaw scholar and author) to write about animism, she insisted, "For tribal peoples, our relationships and kinship with the alive world is simply called *tradition*" (2013: 19). No other word is needed. Hogan has written eloquently and at length about what I call animism, but she does not need my word in order to tell her stories or to intervene with her wisdom. She shows that tradition, or animism (my term), is the way things are, can be, or should be. It is the continuous practice of trying to live well among other beings—kin of many species—all deserving respect even in contexts of predation and consumption.

I am not alone in writing about animists and animism in "new" (to academia) ways. A wide-ranging conversation draws attention to a diversity of efforts to understand particular kinds of human engagement with the larger-than-human world and, particularly, with other-than-human persons, relations, or kin. The debate takes in epistemology—ways of knowing—and ontology—ways of being. It is frequently concerned with critical reflection about the knowledges and lifeways of Indigenous people. But animists can be found everywhere. Indeed, recently some people have found that the term helpfully encapsulates and encourages their core concerns and ambitions, and some of them (perhaps influenced by academic debates) even name themselves "new animists." Among those concerns and ambitions is a desire to live well within multispecies communities or ecologies. Sometimes this propels people to contest threats to the well-being of other beings or ecologies, at local and/or planetary scales.

The academic "new animism" debate is also frequently concerned with critical reflection about the assumptions and ambitions of those Bruno Latour called "Moderns" (1993). This thread of the conversation is woven into the tapestry of scholarship that seeks to "make the familiar strange" or, more dramatically and urgently, to contest hegemonic epistemologies and ontologies. Put differently, "new animist" approaches fit with scholarly approaches that do not assume that "we" already know the truth about reality but might, and should, learn from "others." They resonate with determined efforts to decolonize the academy along with the larger "one-world world" (Law 2015) which it often sustains.
"New" clearly implies a contrast with "old." What can be labelled the "old animism" (but only after the emergence of a "new" one) is most often associated with Edward Tylor, the first professor of anthropology in Oxford, and the author of *Primitive Religion* (1871). Tylor took up the term "animism" to convey his idea that religion is definitively a "belief in souls" (or spirits or other metaphysical entities). Religion (and therefore all religions) was, for Tylor, at heart, the continuation of a primitive but understandable mistake in which people attribute intentionality and personality where these are unwarranted (at least by Moderns). There is, according to the sweep of Tylor's work, a rationality

generative of this mistake—it is an understandable and easy mistake to make. It provides an explanation for dreams of deceased relatives, or for improvements to life after a sacrifice or prayer is offered to some putative powerful being. Nonetheless, Tylor did not agree that such experiences and explanations correctly interpret reality, and, he clearly hoped, such interpretations would be replaced by better, more rational knowledge.

This "old animism" is not necessarily obsolete, and more will be said about it below. But it is the "new animism" that interests me. A key moment for many contributors to the new animism is their interest in a conversation between the US anthropologist Irving Hallowell and the Anishinaabe elder, Kiiwiich, in the early to mid-twentieth century (Hallowell 1960). Knowing that Anishinaabe grammar marks rocks (*asiniig*) as grammatically "animate" (by the use of the animate plural suffix -iig), Hallowell asked "are all the stones around us alive?" The elder's somewhat enigmatic reply, "no, but *some* are," has deservedly provoked further conversations. In short, the crucial lesson here is about asking the right question. For Kiiwiich, the point is not to distinguish *categories* (life or death, animacy or inanimacy, personhood or objecthood) but to improve *relationships*. His underlying cultural assumption or traditional ontology is that all existences are able to relate with others in diverse ways—and should relate respectfully (constructively and carefully). Hallowell's use of the term "other-than-human persons" has been fruitful in enabling further consideration of the ways in which beings of diverse species co-construct communities and worlds. For Hallowell's Anishinaabe hosts, such multi-species personhood and personal relations require recognition and enhancement of locally appropriate ways of relating that are respectful and life-enhancing. Thus, Hallowell (taught by his hosts) prefigured the key phenomena of interest in "new animism" as relationality, good living, and world-making.

In the later twentieth century, ethnologists' engagement with the epistemologies and ontologies of many Indigenous people were aided by the retrieval of the term "animism." It had been marginalized or rejected either because other ideas about the origins and definitions of religion had been proposed, or because of the colonialist and primitivist project to which (old) "animism" had contributed. An article by the Israeli anthropologist Nurit Bird-David (1999) marks the coalescence of "new animism" approaches as a focus of renewed discussion. Making use of the Hallowell-Kiiwiich conversation and of the work of other colleagues, Bird-David analyzed some of the value of the term "animism" in approaching epistemology and ontology, especially in relation to the Nayaka of India's Nilgiri hills. Responses to that article by seven colleagues in the same journal issue propelled an increasingly rich debate which has continued in many other publications.

Photo by Dr. Raju Kasambe, CC BY 4.0, Wikimedia Commons

In later publications Bird-David has further enriched the discussion. For example, in her 2018 essay "Persons or Relatives?" she emphasized that however productive and provocative the term "person" has been, it can suggest something too systematic, categorical, or philosophical. It struggles to convey the more typical immediacy and intimacy that enliven the ways many animists speak of, to, and with their other-than-human kin or relations. While she is addressing concerns about the presentation of "tiny-scale" communities, kinship and relationality have become core themes in multi-disciplinary consideration of animist and wider Indigenous knowledges (see, e.g., Kimmerer 2013, and Van Horn, Kimmerer, and Hausdoerffer 2021). There are, for example, significant synergies between new animism and new materialism research and writing. Karen Barad's terms "agential realism" and "intra-action," and her insistence on the inseparability of supposedly discrete phenomena (including researchers and that which they research) have influenced a remarkable range of scholarly fields. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Science and Technology Studies (STS) as well as the full range of ethnographic disciplines provide myriad further examples of

emerging conversations. Importantly the synergies and/or transversal encounters embrace approaches and modes of attention—again, contesting the Modernist project of separating scholarly "experts" from whatever they "observe."

The colonial legacy of the old animism—often a slur accusing Indigenous people of primitivism and folly—has, perhaps, restrained a potentially more fruitful conversation between new animism and critical indigenous studies. Perhaps this is related to the adverse effects of problematic rhetorics about "religion" in inter-cultural contexts—even though, as a label for diverse locally appropriate inter-species conversations and collaborations, "animism" is not only about whatever passes for religion.

As a final thought: although it is vital to take ontologies and cosmopolitics seriously, scholarly discussion of animism can be overly serious and, as with other phenomena, miss the drama and humor of people's relationships with(in) the larger-than-human community. Drama, humor, and vitally, sensuality have not been missed in more popular (and equally profound) elaborations of animism, many inspired by the work of David Abram (1997).

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MULTISPECIES DEMOCRACY AND THE DIFFERENCE HUMAN DIFFERENCE MAKES

Russell C. Powell

Democracy is under siege. Here, there, anywhere we might look, whether in established or nascent democracies, industrial or industrializing nations, Global North or South—electoral processes are being undermined, civil rights are being eroded, and the compulsion toward authoritarianism is arguably stronger today than it has been since World War II. In this short essay, I consider a bright spot among democracy's tremulous prospects today: the emergent discourse around the potential for a *multispecies* democracy.

To this point, arguments for direct democratic representation for nonhumans (voting rights, say) have not been sustained. Advocates of multispecies democracy instead contend that humans should serve as something like *proxies* by giving voice to nonhumans' concerns in democratic processes.[1] Yet because

[1] Representative works on multispecies democracy that stop short of calling for direct democratic representation for nonhuman animals include David Abram, who, in *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (New York: Vintage, 2010), argues that, while nonhumans should be considered as active participants in ecosystems and the political arrangements that provide for their flourishing, only humans can act on other kinds' interests, and Vandana Shiva, in *Earth*

much of the discourse around multispecies democracy is galvanized by an impulse to contest *human exceptionalism* in modern politics, arguments for humans' proxy status tend to sit uncomfortably with multispecies democracy's more radical challenge to anthropocentric conceptions of the subject.

If we grant, as I do, that the strength of the discourse on multispecies democracy is its capacity to reveal the moral and political limitations of defining terms like subjectivity, agency, and freedom solely in relation to human life, then the question of what makes humans capable of acting on nonhumans' behalf only becomes more urgent. Humans' chief difference from nonhuman kind is our *discursive capacity* to establish normative accountability. This restricts participation in democratic governance to humans alone. Our giving proper attention to this difference, as I will show, can help to clarify what makes democracy worth pursuing, even protecting, in a time like ours when democracy is everywhere beset with opposition and hostility.

As a start, let me note the three interconnected factors that account for the recent rise in the interest in multispecies democracy (hereafter MD): (1) Insights into the complex interdependencies between species and their environments in interdisciplinary fields like animal studies, environmental humanities, and eco-criticism have fostered new ideas about inclusive governance models. (2) Scientific advances in our understanding of nonhuman cognition are challenging long-established assumptions about the difference between humans and other species. And (3) these insights and advances have emerged alongside a broader cultural shift inspired by the spread of global environmental awareness, evident in the growth of social movements like veganism, which emphasize empathy for other species.

Philosophically speaking, as I mentioned earlier, discourses related to what I am referring to as MD are motivated in large part by the desire to contest the assumption of human exceptionalism. The primary concern, specifically, is with whom and what counts as a subject. As the late French philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour best demonstrated, modern philosophy's assumptions—that subjects are only humans, say; or that subjects can only be individuals, or that subjects stand apart from their ecological relations—are

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Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace (Berkeley, Cal.: North Atlantic Books, 2005), who advocates for a more inclusive form of democracy that respects the rights of nonhuman beings, though with those rights being articulated by humans. Others such as Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, and more, some of whom I note in the pages that follow, also have made important contributions to discourses aimed at fostering multispecies coexistence (even if they do not make explicit reference to "multispecies democracy") without seeking to establish formal mechanisms for granting direct democratic representation to nonhuman entities.

obstacles to remaking politics in light of humans' thoroughgoing relational entanglements with nonhuman life.[2]

Edward Hicks, The Peaceable Kingdom, 1834, Wikimedia Commons

Following Latour, a cadre of powerful voices, including the political theorist Jane Bennett, feminist theorists Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, and the anthropologists Eduardo Kohn and Marisol de la Cadena, have challenged traditional political theory by broadening the scope of democratic representation.[3] These thinkers aver that, if the subject can be shown to be

[2] See, e.g., Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, Catherine Porter, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Here, Latour built on his earlier analysis in *We Have Never Been Modern*, Catherine Porter, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), which sought to overcome the modernist separation of nature and society as an artificial construction that overlooks the complex system of interactions tying humans and nonhumans together. Latour later came to advocate for a broader understanding of actors involved in political processes when he introduced his renowned Actor-Network-Theory in *Reassembling the Social: Introducing Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[3] See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and*

indiscernible from its relations, then traditional ideas about what "agency," "responsibility," and "freedom" mean will likewise require a similar revision. Whereas classical liberal tradition, by bestowing the rights, powers, and liabilities of legal subjects solely on human beings, has historically authorized colonial and extractive political practice, MD's proponents call for something that better resembles Indigenous notions of kinship and collaborative survival. In places like Ecuador, Bolivia, and New Zealand, where human rights conventions have been extended into the more-than-human realm, this shift is already taking place.

Not surprisingly, the principal complaint the advocates of MD have—again, philosophically speaking—is with Kant and the conventional means of conceiving the modern subject. While nonhuman entities are normally recognized as working with and against human purposes, philosophical convention holds that it is *only* humans that retain the capacity for genuine intentionality, i.e., Kant's famed contribution to the modern understanding of subjecthood. In response to this convention, the advocates of MD reconfigure ideas about what qualifies someone (or something) as a subject by highlighting the active role nonhuman entities play in shaping the world. Think of an event like a power blackout, Jane Bennett says, where electrons, transmission wires, neoliberal regulatory policies, human consumers, and more can all be acknowledged as acting, and thus possess agency, along multiple and concurring points in the complex assemblage they constitute.[4]

Recent works on animal and plant life better indicate the specific interests of MD's most prominent advocates, however. The philosopher Thom van Dooren explores the ethical implications of the complex social lives of birds and highlights species like crows' distinctive political capacities.[5] Vinciane Despret, a philosopher of science, argues that traditional scientific approaches to

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Significant Otherness (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2003) and *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013); and Marisol de la Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

[4] See chapter two of Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*. Singular objects can also be thought to possess agency, Bennett says, for example how trash can be shown to influence human behavior and environmental conditions (ibid., 107). Latour's influence on Bennett along these lines is important to note, though certain differences in Latour's and Bennett's accounts are themselves notable. For example, while Latour's Actor-Network-Theory focuses on the ways agency is distributed among actors (human and nonhuman) across interactions that occur within relational networks, Bennett's focus is on the ethical and political implications that arise when nonhuman entities' own agency is recognized.

[5] Thom van Dooren, *The Wake of Crows: Living and Dying in Shared Worlds* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

understanding nonhuman life can be altered to appreciate animals' unique agentive competencies.[6] Regarding nonanimal life, the anthropologist Anna Tsing has examined the important role fungi play in shaping human economic and social systems. And Merlin Sheldrake, a biologist, portrays plants and fungi not as passive entities but as dynamic participants in biological and social processes.[7]

For these thinkers, agency is not reducible to the autonomy of the will. Gone are concerns over heteronomy and the pursuit of transcendental freedom so crucial to conventional (*viz.*, Kantian) philosophical concerns. In their place, van Dooren, Despret, Tsing, Sheldrake, and others propose that agency emerges from the complex interactions between networks of actors—both human *and* nonhuman; animals, technologies, institutions, and more—whose influence, however small, shapes collective outcomes. There is no nature-culture binary. This democratization of agency, which borrows much from Latour, also informs the democratization of political representation. If nonhuman entities determine societal and ecological statuses, all beings should be given the status necessary for participating in political decision-making.[8]

While the advocates of MD have been successful in unsettling long-held assumptions about human exceptionalism, I doubt they significantly challenge liberal democracy and the philosophical tradition that underwrites it. A re-examination of Immanuel Kant will indeed confirm that tradition's affirmation of human difference, as I demonstrate in what follows. Yet this affirmation does not necessarily entail the assumption of human exceptionalism that MD's proponents rightly oppose.

According to Kant, what distinguishes agents from non-agentive entities is not some special mind stuff, as René Descartes held. Rather, we are agents because we make judgments *intentionally*. Through our judgments, that is, we are reckoned *responsible*. Note that this account of autonomy is not the one commonly attributed to Kant, which, as we just saw, obtains merely in the power

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[6] Vinciane Despret, *What Would Animals Say if We Asked the Right Questions?* Brett Buchanan, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

[7] Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2021); Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds, and Shape Our Futures* (New York: Random House, 2021).

[8] Interest around MD has emerged alongside, and perhaps because of, the popularity of the philosophical movement in speculative realism, otherwise known as "flat ontology," which focuses on the autonomy of objects by emphasizing their existing independently of human perception and use. Foundational works in this movement include Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, Ray Brassier, trans. (London: Continuum, 2008); Levi Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, 2011), and Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (New York: Pelican, 2018).

to formulate and enact intentional aims. Kant, in fact, fixates on something far more rudimentary: that intentional states (our beliefs, say) have distinctly *normative* significance. Our judgments are *commitments*, in other words; they are exercises of authority. We live, move, and have our being in a normative space—a space of rules.[9]

It was Ludwig Wittgenstein in the 1940s, and later Wilfrid Sellars in the 1950s, who retrieved from Kant this argument for the normative significance of intentional states. Entailed in that argument, crucially, is the basis for what sets humans apart from the rest of creation: our linguistic capacity. We are free to constrain ourselves through our submission to conceptual norms, namely linguistically denominated rules. Sellars summarizes this point when he says that "man is a creature not of *habits*, but of *rules*," before memorably spotlighting humans' difference from non-humans, concluding, "When you cease to recognize rules, you will walk on four feet."[10]

This is not to say nonhuman animals are not expressive, that nonhuman species do not *also* communicate with intention. Elephants, we now know, call out to each other by name. African grey parrots regularly use words to identify colors, shapes, quantities, and even to express desires and feelings. Plants, too, are expressive. Trees communicate both with one another and with other plant species through complex root networks, while fungi form vast mycorrhizal communication channels to facilitate the exchange of information to adapt to changes in the environment. Some animal species even engage in the sort of norm-governed practices, which Kant and others believed were the sole province of human beings. For instance, primate species like chimpanzees adopt normative attitudes toward one another in the maintenance of social order, thereby signaling an implicit understanding that norms are not objects in the causal order but instead are *instituted* by beings who shape their worlds.

"Implicit" is the operative word here. For it is humans' distinct ability to make the norms we rely upon *explicit* that sets our norm-using practices apart from—makes them truly different from—nonhuman kind. As Robert Brandom has shown vis-à-vis Kant's turn from epistemology to semantics, merely being able to distinguish between the appropriate and inappropriate application of norms is

[9] My analysis here is indebted to Robert Brandom's account of Kant's post-metaphysical epistemology, and particularly Brandom's claim that the normativity of intentionality is Kant's most "axial insight." See Robert Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

[10] Wilfrid Sellars, *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds: The Early Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, ed. Jeffrey Sicha (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1980), 138. Original emphasis.

not sufficient for creatures to be said to be able to participate in genuine discursive practice.[11]

What *is* required, rather, is the ability to make explicit the inferential commitments implicit in the reasoning being used to structure the shared world. This means being able to account for whether a given agent is entitled to a certain commitment, which is to say, *justified* in their beliefs. That justification is derived from a complex process wherein agents distinguish between what would and would not entitle one to maintain a particular commitment. Not only must the entitlements, commitments, and their inferential articulations implicit in practical reasoning need to be made explicit in order to count as being governed by genuinely intentional acts; but entitlements, commitments, and their constitutive inferential relations also must be inheritable through *discursive testimony*, the aforesaid process of giving, taking, and exchanging reasons that both justify the commitments one is entitled to as well as make explicit the commitments one is said to be justified to have undertaken.

It is precisely *this* sort of capacity—genuine discursivity—that differentiates human beings from proto-linguistic animals (or plants and fungi). It is also what makes possible a genuine participation in democratic governance, in which the exercise of power is always subject to being challenged, to being held *accountable*. This is especially evident when individuals in power (elected officials, say) can be shown to lack sufficient reasons to justify certain actions that have ill effects on the individuals who confer power upon them (their electors).

What the proponents of MD help to illumine, recall, is the limitation of philosophical tradition to define agency purely in light of a being's capacity for *intentional action*. Agents' norm-institution is irreducible to the capacity for self-legislation, in other words. In an ecologically entangled world such as ours, political arrangements cannot (and should not) be modeled merely on agreements undertaken between independent rational agents as Kant mistakenly believed. The pernicious assumption of human exceptionalism and, implicitly, superiority, specified in the supposition that humans can be thought to stand apart from their ecological relations, should be contested at every turn.

Yet human difference makes a genuine difference, so to speak, when we discern how humans *alone* possess the capacity to make explicit the norms that govern intentional acts. To do this, to make explicit the norms that guide our acts through discursive practice (*viz.*, the exchange of reasons), is simultaneously to subject norms to critical scrutiny and rational revision in view of the purposes they serve. To possess this capacity is to possess the capacity for taking part in

[11] The full account of Brandom's semantic inferentialism is contained in *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

democratic governance—both as a being accountable to others and as a being who holds others to account. This, however, is a capacity decidedly lacking in nonhuman kind.

The success of MD's exponents to elucidate nonhumans' commitment to norms, whether among crows, chimpanzees, trees and fungi, or myriad other forms of nonhuman life, has advanced a compelling case for acknowledging nonhumans' moral significance. Nonhumans indeed have their own lives and experiences, as well as make vital contributions to the shared world. Yet as I have been demonstrating, what is essential to democracy's success is that *everyone* in democratic society recognize each other as capable participants in discursive practice. The reasons for this are as much for establishing who has authority in democratic society as it is for holding that authority to account.

When citizens engage in discursive practices, that is, engage in making claims, providing reasons, and evaluating one another's justifications, they actively engage in the process to attribute authority to one another. This sort of authority is not conferred from above as a king might claim his position of sovereignty by divine right (or, more apropos of our own cultural moment, when would-be dictators claim authority by virtue of their inherent superiority or genius). No, someone's having authority in a democracy, namely the authority to participate in the structuring of governance to which the conditions of their lives are subjected, instead develops from their being recognized as responsive, so responsible, to the same norms to which *all democratic participants* are answerable.

G.W.F. Hegel, by building on Kant's semantic conception of the normative, showed how norms emerge from the mutual recognition agents give to each other when they share a culture, which in turn shapes the subjectivity and rationality constitutive of that culture and the values it enshrines. Under the broadly Hegelian rubric I have been explicating, nonhumans do indeed lack the authority to take part in democratic governance because they lack the capacity to participate fully in recognitive activities. This does not mean that nonhumans should lack a *voice*, however, as MD's advocates have successfully shown. As we see in a country like Ecuador's constitution, which declares that ecosystems retain inalienable rights, humans are responsible for petitioning on ecosystems' behalf to ensure those rights are acknowledged and protected. This is in line with the discourse on MD that I have been explicating here, where I have sought to clarify the political relevance of humans' difference. For while nonhuman entities should be recognized as participants in the body politic, it is both an indication and imperative of our identity as human that we, as members of that same body, speak in support of nonhumans.

THE VEGETAL ROOTS OF RELIGION: MEDITATIONS ON THE INTERSECTION OF CRITICAL PLANT STUDIES AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Rachael Petersen

The Seed

The humanities have turned. Or perhaps—like a plant—they have spiraled, curved, circumnutated outwards and up, grasping more of the world as they grow.[1] "New materialist" and "posthuman" thinkers such as Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Janet Bennett, Bruno Latour, and Donna Haraway invite us to consider the agency of nonhuman beings and allegedly "inanimate" things. Like plants bending towards the sun, the "nonhuman turn" enacts a Copernican revolution away from what many long considered the exclusive center of subjectivity: humans. Scholarship once preoccupied with human social relations, power, and signification now also orbits questions of nonhuman ontology, and

[1] The term "circumnutate" was coined by Charles Darwin in his 1880 book, *The Power of Movement in Plants*. "Circumnutation" refers to the spiral or elliptical pattern plants' stems or tendrils make as they grow upward.

how to reckon with the winged, leafed, slimy mass of matter that comprises Earth.

Sprouting from the nonhuman turn is the field of critical plant studies, which considers plants as agents in their own right. Critical plant scholars think not *about* or *for*, but rather *with*, plants.[2] Thinking with plants requires not only bringing human inquiry to bear on plants, but more importantly, remaining receptive to how plant life complicates and transforms the very nature of that inquiry. Indeed, in his seminal book *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life,* Michael Marder demonstrates how apprenticing to the alterity of plants causes us to rethink thought altogether, rendering it plantlike (2013).

Critical plant studies is bolstered by a recent surge in cutting-edge science that reports the complex ways in which plants communicate, sense, and make sense of their environments. Michael Pollan's 2013 *New Yorker* article "The Intelligent Plant" first brought these conversations into mainstream discourse; since then, the success of books such as *Braiding Sweetgrass, The Light Eaters, Entangled Life,* and *Finding the Mother Tree* speak to growing popular demand to be inspired by other species. This contemporary research in many cases resonates with wisdom that has been safeguarded by Indigenous and folk traditions, as well as ignored or repressed strains of ecological thought within major philosophical and religious traditions.

And yet, despite growing attention to materiality, the study of religion has been slow to embrace critical plant studies, lagging the fields of anthropology, literary studies, and philosophy.[3] If "materializing the study of religion means asking how religion happens materially," perhaps critical plant scholarship invites us to consider how religion happens *vegetally* (Meyer et al 2010, 209). In other words, how might the study and practice of religion metamorphize under a close apprenticeship to plant life?

What may be at stake, if we follow Marder, are the very categories foundational to philosophical and religious thought. Plants, by their very physiology, accomplish a "lived destruction of [Western] metaphysics" (2013, 53). To take a simple yet profound example, plant morphology rejects the classic etymological definition of individual—that which cannot be divided and live. As anyone who has propagated a *pothos* knows, division for a plant is life. Unlike

[2] The phrase "to think with" here borrows from the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who (in his study *Totemism*), remarked that "natural species are not chosen because they are 'good to eat' [*bonnes à manger*] but because they are 'good to think' with [*bonnes à penser*]." (1962, 132).

[3] Notable book-length exceptions to this claim include ethnographic accounts of how spiritual communities interact with plants, such as *People Trees* by David Haberman (2013), Munjed Murad's 2022 dissertation "A Tale of Two Trees: Unveiling the Sacred Life of Nature in Islamic and Christian Traditions," as well as philosopher Michael Marder's meandering account of Hildegard von Bingen's spiritual ecology (2021).

animals, which have highly specialized parts, plants iterate and reiterate interchangeable units. Animals achieve their final physiology in embryonic form; plants constantly change shape. Plants privilege perpetual becoming over being.

Inspired by the structure of plants, the meditations below reach but never arrive. They form not a continuous individual argument about the study of religion and plants; rather, they proliferate thoughts that successively sprout and fall, yielding to new life.

"All Genesis is Phytogenesis"

In the beginning, some say, the world was not for us. First, there was chaos. Then bang, then rock. No air, no inhale, no lungs, no organism. According to Genesis 2:7, God formed humans from dust and breathed the breath of life into our nostrils, a cosmogenic CPR. The abiotic assented to the biotic. Stardust alchemized into cells. Life woke up with a choke.

At what point did humans become possible and why? And on whose account? Biologists trace human origins to the Great Oxygenation Event, that fateful genesis of air two billion years ago. Before the event, the atmosphere as we know it did not exist. Not until tiny alchemical cyanobacteria photosynthesized sunlight, spitting out oxygen as waste in their wake. Accumulated O_2 molecules formed a downpayment on life. Plants' exhales awaited our inhales. Creation, one might say, held its breath.

Photo by Ganesh Dhamodkar, Under the Bodhi Tree, CC BY 4.0, Wikimedia Commons

"The life of plants," says philosopher Emanuele Coccia, "is a cosmogony in action, the constant genesis of our cosmos" (2018, 10). In a similar vein, Marder claims that "all genesis is phytogenesis" (2023, 8).

Was it God, then, or plants, or both riding side-saddle, that first breathed the breath of life into the world? The breath-giving reality of plants may be why so many cultures have situated a tree at the root of reality. Trees, like gods, self-fashion. They make and remake worlds.

The Upanishads speak of the *asvattha* tree (*Ficus religiosa*) at the center of existence: "All worlds are contained in it, and no one goes beyond" (Hall 2019, 36). Norse mythology tells us of an ash tree, Yggdrasil, with limbs "spread out over all the world and stand above heaven" (Ibid., 37). These cosmic trees root in dark and reach towards light. They bridge the terrestrial and the celestial, spanning countless intermediary realms. Their spanning transmits life: plants "live both above and below ground, joining Skyworld to the Earth. Plants know how to make food and medicine from light and water, and they give it away" (Kimmerer 2013, 9).

Surveying the persistence of the "cosmic tree" across a variety of religious cultures and contexts, Mircea Eliade concluded that "the tree represents . . . the living cosmos, endlessly renewing itself" (1958, 267). But the very fact that plants did and do create our world—generating the conditions that sustain breath—invites critical plant scholars to forgo the language of representation in favor of *substantiation*.

Writing about the ritual offering of copal tree resin in contemporary and historical Indigenous communities of Mesoamerica, Rebecca Mendoza recounts how, in one account of Aztec creation, four gods sacrifice themselves to transform into four trees, which act as "cosmic antennas" reaching from lower to upper realms. When Indigenous communities cut copal trees to harvest resin for incense, the tree bleeds. This blood does not represent. It *substantiates* an underlying dynamic, monist reality: "Trees," says Mendoza, "are a permanent manifestation of creative forces, and tree resin is the blood of cosmic bodies that manifest as sturdy wood trunks. Inside copal trees, energy forces are flowing" (Mendoza 2023, 9).

The copal tree, and the phytogenesis behind other cosmic trees, invites us to do what Eliade ascribed to "primitive understanding:" (1958, 269) that is, to know that plants do not merely *symbolize*, they enact. This thinking is "primitive" only insofar as it is primordial—words that share the Latinate root *primus*, a linguistic root that points to a metaphysical root: first, existing or persisting from the beginning.

All genesis is phytogenesis.

The Religious and Racialized Roots of Plant Panic

When colonizers arrived in the Americas, they encountered peoples with deep relationships to and practices with plants. Some worked with plants to heal the sick, others to convene with the dead or find lost community members. Many engaged psychoactive plants in important rituals: in Mexico, the Aztecs revered *ololiuhqui* (*Ipomoea tricolor syn. Turbina corymbosa*, a species of Morning Glory), *peyote* (*Lophophora williansii*), and *teonanácatl* (*Psilocybe* mushrooms). Indigenous peoples of the Amazon worked with the San Pedro cactus (*Echinopsis pachanoi syn. Trichocereus pachanoi*), *ayahuasca* (a combination of, typically, *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*), and *yopo* (a hallucinogenic snuff made from *Anadenanthera peregrine*) (Johnstad 2023, 6).

Faced with peoples who located the sacred squarely within the material, colonizers deemed them primitive and their plants demonic. The Catholic Church responded with strict prohibition. Said a friar who was charged with seizing *pipiltzintzintlis* from the people of Xochimilco in 1698:

> We come to take this herb from those natives. It is not permitted, nor is it good that they drink this herb because with it they see many vile and evil things and visions and when they take it they speak with demons and other vile monsters. This herb is prohibited and forbidden by the Inquisition (Chuchiak, 2012, 312).

What so terrified the Spaniards? Was it the fact that so-called primitive peoples accessed powerful and strange states? That they opened doors to realities that evaded the conquistadors' perception? Or was it because they open these doors not by contemplating the ethereal heights of God, but by allying with what sprouts from the dark depths of soil?

Who is afraid of cactus, mushroom, and vine?

At the very least, plant panic was racially motivated and religiously supercharged; its fruits long outlasted the Inquisition. One hears echoes of the 16th century in this 20th century commentary on cannabis, used by Indigenous (women) *herbolarias* in Mexico:

> The horror that this plant inspires has reached such an extreme that when the common people . . . see even just a single plant, they feel as if in the presence of a demonic spirit. Women and children run frightened and they make the sign of the cross simply upon hearing its name. The friars hurl their excommunications against those who grow and use it and the authorities persecute it with such fury that they order it to be uprooted and

> burnt, imposing cruel penalties on whom they find it. In a word, they believe that it is a weed that has come from hell. (Campos 2012, 165)

As Nelson Maldanado-Torres has pointed out, "The prehistory of modern racism has been linked to the emergence of Christianity not only because it was the religion of the Roman Empire, but also because of its increasingly global project of expanding the reach of 'the true religion,' a project that intensifies and becomes increasingly intolerant beginning as early as the eleventh century" (2014, 641). It is no coincidence that this intolerance focused on peoples with deep relationships to plants and fungi, as well as to animals, spirits, and other more-than-human beings. Might we then also say that the prehistory of modern racism is inextricable not only from the emergence of Christianity, but also its concomitant "horror" towards plants and fungi?

A Vegetal *Ressourcement*

It is tempting, and not altogether misguided, to locate the "root cause" of our ecological crises at the feet of Christianity. Lynn White, Jr., famously did (1967). Undoubtedly, certain interpretations of Christian theology helped birth frameworks for human exceptionalism that drive species extinction: to wit, dominionism, which contends that humans can use other creatures how we wish; Cartesian dualism, which severed mind from matter and restricted the former to humans; and the *scala naturae*, or great chain of being, that placed all life in a hierarchy of perfection towards God—with plants and animals falling below *Homo sapiens*.

It is equally tempting, at first glance, to characterize Christian scripture as portraying plants as categorically passive. For example, Matthew Hall calls this portrayal a "deliberate move to expand human claims on the natural world while avoiding moral consequences [of such claims]" (Hall 2011, 55).

And yet what is Christianity? And what is a plant? Why compare a prickly bear to a date palm? The category of Christianity (and of any religion), much like plant life, is internally diverse, contested, always evolving, and shaped by local ecology. As scholar of religion Mary-Jane Rubenstein puts it, while sometimes it seems that the easiest way to "locate creativity, animacy, or divinity" within the material world would be "to appeal to traditions that lie outside the Greco-Roman-Hebraic lineage we incoherently call the Western Canon," it is also true that there may be "counter-ontologies internal to the traditions such reanimations seek to critique" (2018, 69-70). Writ botanically: Christianity is a diverse ecosystem. We can always find unexpected blooms and neglected weeds thriving amid what first appears as a hostile theological monocrop. We must only look to find them. We must nurture them when we do.

The study of religion is ripe for what I have elsewhere termed a "*vegetal ressourcement*" (2024). *Ressourcement*, a term most often associated with the Catholic *nouvelle théologie* movement of the mid-twentieth century, refers to an attempt to retrieve aspects of a tradition ignored by dominant intellectual forces (Flynn and Murray, 2012). In addition to reckoning with the colonial legacy of plant-panic, we might also seek to revive forgotten (pl)an(t)cestors within the very traditions we seek to critique.

The Spiritual Lives of Plants

Let us reconsider those passive plants in Christianity. The cross upon which Jesus Christ was crucified was, after all, a tree. According to the anonymously authored Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood* (ca. 8th–10th c.), the tree was sentient: "alive, aware, reacting to the Crucifixion" (Murphy 2013, 125). Not only that, but the tree suffered martyrdom alongside Christ: "They drove dark nails through me," the tree announces in *The Dream,* "They mocked us both." The tree's active participation in the Crucifixion raises a profound question: do plants have religious lives?

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling once quipped that if plants were conscious, they would worship the sun as their god. And who can say they don't? The physiology of plants in many ways resembles unceasing prayer. For example, plants are heliotropes. They feed on light. They consume their creator, rendering vegetal life a kind of continual sacrament. And because sunlight and CO_2 are readily available, plants live a sessile lifestyle. They do not need to run to find food or flee predators. Their stillness requires that they maximize their surface area to imbibe more light, water, and air. Like patient mendicants, they remain firmly planted, arms outstretched, surrendering ever more of their being to their maker. Plants don't just pray without ceasing; they body forth an unceasing prayer.

Inspired by Schelling, the 19th century German polymath Gustav Theodor Fechner suggested that plants enjoy a kind of spiritual life in their interactions with the sun (1848). In a particularly moving passage in his treatise on plant-souls, Fechner imagines plants' heliotropism—directional growth towards light—as divine accompaniment, resonating with countless Biblical allusions to walking with God.[4] Elsewhere he points out that, unlike humans with our delicate eyes, plants can meet their maker (God/the Sun/light) face-to-face. One thinks of Moses, coming down the mountain with his face burned from the fiery

[4]E.g., Genesis 6:9 "Noah walked faithfully with God."; Micah 6:8: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."; Galatians 5:16: "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

countenance of Yahweh. But plants enjoy yet one additional spiritual advantage, says Fechner: God literally becomes them. "Light becomes a plant" (*Licht wird Pflanze)* (60). Plants are the sun's flesh—the incarnation, earthbound corporeality of divinity.

Plants have stood, in countless traditions, as not only emblematic of spiritual life, but paradigmatic of it. Against Hall, Sam Mickey (2019, 4) explores how the "playful effortlessness" of lilies in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are exemplars for how "the goodness and wisdom of God" are found not in power but in weakness. In the works of Zhuangzi, a tree "provides a perfect exemplar for Daoist action. It attempts nothing and is fully accomplished" (Mickey 2019, 7). Buddhism has a long, rich history of debates over plant sentience, which take on a particular intensity in Zen Buddhism. For the Japanese Tendai monk Ryōgen (912-985), plants not only have spiritual lives, but they *are* the spiritual life. Their sprouting, leafing, reaching, and withering mirrors the four phases practice: desire [for enlightenment], religious practice, bodhi, and nirvana (Rambelli 2001, 17-18).

Attending to the Plantness Within

Why does any of this matter? You might expect me to appeal, as is the trend, to the ecological crises facing humanity. I might argue that centering plants in religious scholarship and practice is necessary to reverse species extinction, protect habitats, and address climate change. But by claiming that critical plant studies will solve complex societal problems, we risk overpromising and underdelivering at worst. At best, this claim glosses over vital steps that connect knowledge with organized collective action. But most importantly, this position instrumentalizes plants: *we will consider them only insofar as they will save us from ourselves*. We will use them as tools for civilizational salvation.

But perhaps the intersection of critical plant studies and religious scholarship affords a profound opportunity to turn inward. Perhaps it invites us to tend to our inner wilds as much as our outer ones. As Monica Gagliano asks, "How can a plant readily know us when we are hardly aware of the plantness within ourselves?" (2018, 15). Plants' stillness demands patience; their subtleties reward close observation. When we contemplate them, we don't change the world. We change. We grow to become more capacious. As the plant-crazed Johann Wolfgang von Goethe famously remarked, "Every object well-contemplated opens a new organ of perception in us" (FA 1.24:596). Centering plants within the study of religion offers a reevaluation of forms of attention that allow us to meet reality in its profligate, multiform weirdness, and reconsider humans' place in it. And isn't this the driving impulse behind so many contemplative traditions? Plants, long overlooked as passive elements within many religious traditions, emerge as

dynamic agents that can transform our understanding of divinity, materiality, and our experience of being human. Studying them may not change the world, but it will no doubt change us.

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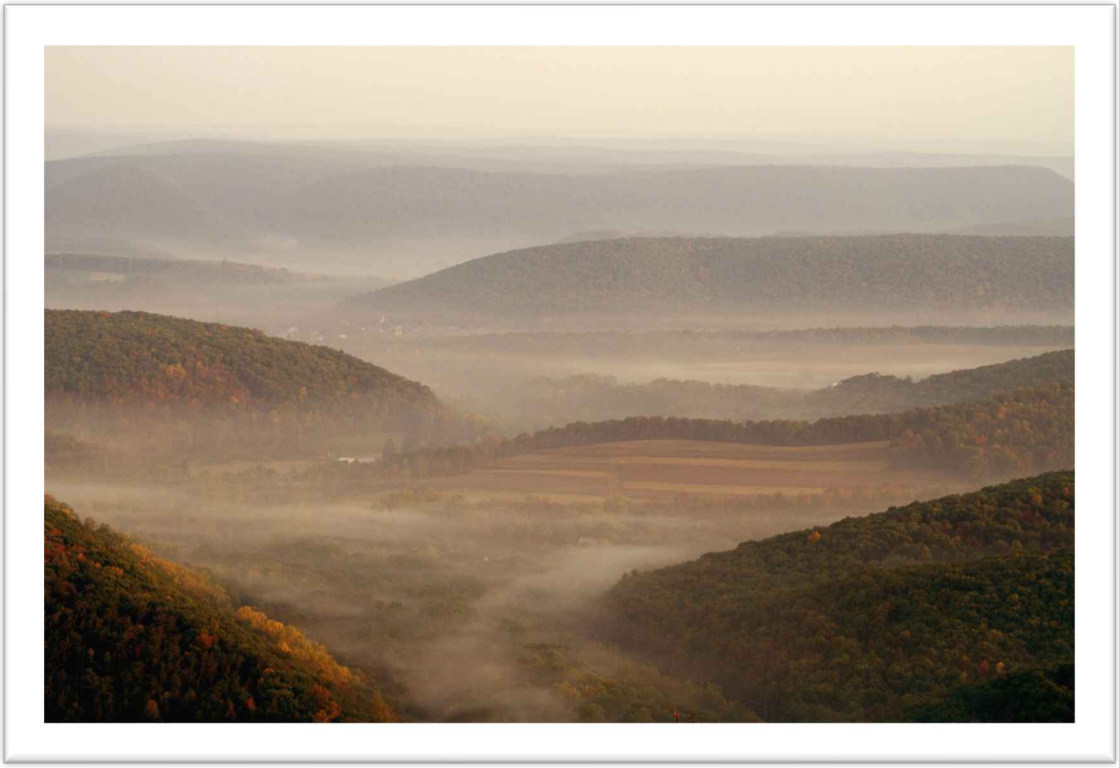
ON FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENT: APPROACHING RELIGION FROM EXTRACTIVE ZONES

Terra Schwerin Rowe



I grew up driving across I-90 from eastern South Dakota to the Black Hills every summer. Along the way I absorbed "Green Religion." Surrounded by ecological and geological wonders, I believed that the best cathedrals are amidst the pines and sensed that marvels like unimpeded star-speckled skies can evoke religious devotion and scientific curiosity together. It wasn't until much later in life that I would know to identify these experiences as part of the *greening of religion*, but such formative encounters are part of what would make the study of religion and environment eventually "click" for me.[1]

"Greening Religion" approaches to religion and environment have had this effect—and continue to have this effect—for many teachers in the field as well as our students. For over two decades, an influential group of scholars have inspired academic and lay interest in the influence of diverse religions, from Jainism to Indigenous lifeways to Christianity, on environmental action.[2] For those who

[1] Donovan O. Schaefer, *Wild Experiment: Feeling Science and Secularism after Darwin* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022)

[2] See, in particular, the introductory documents to The Religions of the World and Ecology conference series, organized by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim. https://fore.yale.edu/Publications/Books/Religions-World-and-Ecology-Book-Series.

didn't grown up in a religious tradition, or grew weary of institutionalized religion but whose environmental activism sparked a kind of spirituality of nature, learning to call these experiences "Dark Green Religion" have had a similar effect of consolidating points of interest and investigation within an intellectual community.[3]

Many who have shared the privilege of summer vacations, access to green spaces, and time to encounter nature for emotional-spiritual renewal may share this kind of "origin story" for their interest in religion and environmental studies. Such experiences are not just affective, experiential motivators, but methodological starting points, directing attention to particular sites of concern, audiences, and interlocutors. Turning my religion and environment scholarly focus from the wonders of natural spaces to the anxieties of climate change with its global scope, and then more recently to rage against unjust petrocultures and extractivism has brought me to reflect on how different affects and experiences orient us to different audiences or sites of concern and call for different methods and starting points.

Not a half mile away from many of my formative Green Religion experiences is the site where General Custer, his troops, and accompanying miners first found gold—a "discovery" that finally provided legitimacy to unabashedly break the Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868). This treaty was between the US government and the Oglala, Miniconjou, Hunkpapa, Blackfeet, Cuthead, Two Kettle, Sans Arcs, Santee, and Brulé bands of Lakota people as well as the Yanktonai Dakota and Arapaho Nation. It marked lands in current day South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, and Montana as "unceded Indian territory" while establishing the Great Sioux Reservation which included ownership of the site sacred to the Lakota, the Pahá Sápa or Black Hills. After the initial discovery of gold, the treaty was never legally altered or annulled but merely ignored—a conclusion supported by the 1980 Supreme Court decision in United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians.[4] Neither my experience in the established religion orientation of the Greening Religion movements nor my engagement with the anti-institutional orientations of Dark Green Religion had prepared me to see that my affective, experiential,

[3] Bron Taylor, Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009).

[4] The Supreme Court ruled that land including the Black Hills had been covered by the Fort Laramie Treaty and had thus been taken illegally by the US government. As part of the decision, the court declared the tribe was owed monetary compensation for the land plus interest. The Lakota Tribe has refused payment (with interest, now over $1 billion) and insisted on the return of their land.

and methodological starting points were themselves embedded in extractive zones.[5]

I fully admit this reflects a problem for me as a scholar of religion and environment. Yet, since it signals a problem with orientations, assumptions, gut-level responses, and perspectives rooted in histories of settler colonialism and white privilege, these are not merely the result of individual circumstance but signal broader, shared problems baked-in to particular academic approaches. With Max Liboiron we could emphasize that since these are problems connected to "ways of being in the world," they are, in particular, problems of scholarly method.[6]

This is where I think religion and environment discourses need to be heading: Give close attention to and methodological starting places from extractive zones.[7] Production and consumption of extracted resources like oil and coal, after all, are

[5] My understanding of the extractive zone is informed here by Gómez-Barris who defines it as "the colonial paradigm, worldview, and technologies that mark out religions of 'high biodiversity' in order to reduce life to capitalist resource conversion." She goes on to define extractivism as "colonial capitalism and its afterlives: extending from its sixteenth century emergence until the present day and including the recent forty-year neoliberal privatization and deregulation process, as well as the rise and fall of the progressive states called the Pink Tide in Latin American nations." Macarena Gómez-Barris, The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), xvi.

[6] Liboiron, Pollution is Colonialism (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 1, fn. 1.

[7] For more on religion and extractive zones, see the special issue of Religions on "Religion in Extractive Zones," especially Rowe, Sideris, and Zenner, "Religions in Extractive Zones: Methods, Imaginaries, Solidarities," Religions (forthcoming). This approach wouldn't be to replace or exclude others, but to emphasize the importance of a close examination of the imbrications of extractive zones and religious systems. This, for example, marks a strategic and methodological difference from the approach articulated by Bron Taylor in the Encyclopedia of Religion & Nature (London and New York: Continuum, 2008). Where Taylor calls for the "widest variety of perspectives to engage the meaning and relationships that inhere to the human religious encounter with nature" (x) and the "widest possible range of phenomena related to the relationships" between humans, religions, and Earth's living systems (vii-viii), the approach I'm advocating for here would not expand to the "widest possible range," but zoom in to foreground the dynamics of racial capitalism and extractivism. Significantly, as critical race theorists have emphasized, universalization (the "widest possible") moves come with their own set of blinders. The Encyclopedia includes entries on "crop circles," "Sexuality and Ecospirituality," "Zulu War Rituals," "Wicca," "Disney," and "Fly Fishing." But it does not include indexed terms, let alone entries, on extractive zones, extraction, colonization, or decolonization. Exxon is included with references in four individual entries, but oil, petroleum or fossil fuels are not listed in the index. The aim of studying religions in and from extractive zones would not be to account for any or every manifestation of the religious, but to zoom in on the production, functioning, and impact of racial capitalist extraction and the multiple ways religious praxis and discourse gets employed in these contexts.

the primary drivers of climate change[8] and sites of massive social, economic, and racial injustice.[9] Even in the turn away from fossil fuels to "renewables" or "green energy," extractivism is intensifying. Increasing evidence suggests that green and "renewable" energy is not functioning as replacement for hydrocarbons, rather renewable energy is merely providing an additional source of energy.[10] Even if it would replace fossil fuels, all the batteries, solar panels, and green technologies require mineral extraction for their production, meaning that extractive activities will only be expanding and intensifying in any techno-driven "renewable" economy.[11] A focus on extractive zones would also not necessarily entail ignoring environmental concerns like multi-species justice and biodiversity loss, but would emphasize their interconnection. For example, as Macarena Gómez-Barris emphasizes, extractive zones are not coincidentally selected in biodiverse regions

[8] "Fossil fuels—coal, oil and gas—are by far the largest contributor to global climate change, accounting for over seventy-five per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and nearly ninety per cent of all carbon dioxide emissions." ("Causes and Effects of Climate Change," United Nations, Climate Action. https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change#:~:text=Fossil).

[9] See Nick Estes and Jaskiran Dhillon, eds., Standing with Standing Rock: Voices from the #NoDAPL Movement (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2019). See Lauren Redness, Oak Flat: A Fight for Sacred Land in the American West (New York: Random House, 2020). See also, Imbolo Mbue, How Beautiful We Were: A Novel (New York: Random House, 2021), a fictionalized compilation of in-depth research on the social, political, economic, environmental and gender-based violence endured by local communities in oil extraction zones around the world.

[10] Several political and world economy leaders have recently promised to increase renewables—while also expanding fossil fuel extraction. Nearly all of the "top 20 fossil fuel-producing countries"—including those who are also promising to increase renewable energy production— are projected to drill for more oil and gas in 2030 than ever before (David Gellas and Manuela Andreoni, "Coming soon: more oil, gas and coal," New York Times, Nov 9, 2023. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/09/climate/coming-soon-more-oil-gas-and-coal.html?pvid=ssprdkBgjPwdi-MIegJmrJxY&u2g=c&smid=url-share). This is part of the dynamic York and Bell have traced in energy transitions from the past two hundred years. They argue we have never had a modern energy transition—only energy additions. (Richard York and Shannon Elizabeth Bell, "Energy Transitions or Additions? Why a Transition from Fossil Fuels Requires More than the Growth of Renewable Energy," Energy Research & Social Science, 51 (2019): 40-43.)

[11] Research on EU access to minerals necessary for renewable technologies suggests that EU demand for lithium and other minerals for electric cars and energy storage will increase 21-fold by 2050. For wind turbines, demand for rare earth minerals will increase 4.5 times by 2030 and 5.5 times by 2050. Joint Research Centre, "Solutions for a resilient EU raw materials supply chain," March 16, 2023. https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/solutions-resilient-eu-raw-materials-supply-chain-2023-03-16_en. See also, Thea Riofrancos, "The Rush to 'Go Electric' Comes with a Hidden Cost: Destructive Lithium Mining," The Guardian, June 14, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/14/electric-cost-lithium-mining-decarbonasation-salt-flats-chile.

but are often a focus of extractive endeavors for precisely this reason.[12] This all suggests that the extractive zone will only increasingly be at the heart of social-environmental justice issues—from global climate change to local toxic pollution, land appropriation, and biodiversity loss—into the foreseeable future.

Photo by Sebastian Pichler on Unsplash

But what this means for the study of religion—the kinds of theoretical and methodological shifts it requires—remains under-examined. Extractive zones are clearly sites of religious contestation and resistance.[13] But as energy humanities and petroculture scholars have amply demonstrated, energy intensive and extractive practices have also produced culture.[14] I and an increasing number of other religion scholars have also emphasized that a significant swath of this cultural production has been religious—even as religions have informed and infused desires and logics of extraction.[15] This is true even from the beginnings of religion as a scholarly endeavor rooted in extractive epistemologies.

While some religion and environment scholars have emphasized the importance of not assuming the category of religion and paying more critical attention to how religion has been constructed as a discourse in relation to

[12] Gómez-Barris, xvi.

[13] See footnote 10.

[14] Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer, eds., Energy Humanities: An Anthology (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017); Sheena Wilson, Adam Carlson, and Imre Szeman, Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).

[15] Darren Dochuk, Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America (New York: Basic Books, 2019). Terra Schwerin Rowe, Of Modern Extraction: Experiments in Critical Petro-theology (London: Bloomsbury, 2023). The work of the Energy, Extraction and Religion Seminar at the AAR is a good example as well.

nature,[16] what hasn't been readily recognized or given sufficient critical attention are the ways that religion discourses, knowledge production and constructs of what will become identified as modern religion emerged in historical extractive zones and through extractive (methodological and epistemological) practices. Charles Long was a key early advocate of a shift within religious discourses to attend more critically to the construction of the category of religion. He emphasized the beginnings of the study of religion in Enlightenment contexts employing and reinterpreting information gleaned from racialized, colonial encounters. Long analyzed the crucial location of the emergence of modern religious concepts as emerging from the transcultural contact zones of colonialism and enslavement.[17] Fetishes, in particular, emerged as a key example of something identified with "primitive religion" that was seen as an impediment to the ability to make rational economic decisions about the value of matter. As Long emphasizes, with reference to anthropologist William Pietz, the concept of the fetish emerged first in 16th century texts written on the Gold Coast of Africa when Portuguese merchants encountered West African peoples. Here the fetish, theorized as a religiously-induced mistake in attributing value to matter, was born. From there, Enlightenment thinkers like Charles de Brosses would take up the concept to think about the ways people value things, the relationship between rational economic valuing and religious beliefs, and a theory of human moral and intellectual development that could be traced—following E. B. Tylor's Primitive Culture—according to a continuum of religions stretching from primitive animists to fully rational Christian monotheists.[18] These are the roots of modern religion—and while Long emphasizes that these concepts emerge in transcultural contact zones, given their location on the African Gold Coast with emerging traffic of enslaved persons and mineral wealth, Lisa Sideris, Christiana Zenner, and I argue that we could also identify these as extractive zones.[19]

But extraction formed more than an historical origin point for modern constructions of religion. As Jennifer Reid emphasizes in a volume dedicated to honoring Long's legacy in religious scholarship, "Long's specific contribution to this tradition of scholarship has been in probing the ways in which the study of religion has been informed by both the methods of the Enlightenment sciences

[16] Taylor, "Introduction," Encyclopedia of Religion & Nature, vii-xxi.

[17] Long, "Transculturation and Religion: An Overview," Ellipsis . . . : The Collected Writings of Charles H. Long (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 145-56.

[18] Long, "Indigenous People, Materialities, and Religion: Outline for a New Orientation to Religious Meaning," in Religion and Global Culture: New Terrain in the Study of Religion and the Work of Charles H. Long, Jennifer Reid, ed., 167-180. (New York: Lexington Books, 2003). See also Jay Kameron Carter's text engaging Long with a chapter specifically focused on the fetish in The Anarchy of Black Religion: A Mystic Song (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023).

[19] "Religions in Extractive Zones: Methods, Imaginaries, Solidarities," Religions (forthcoming).

and also the data extracted from various geographical locations that constituted the arena of European colonial expansion."[20] As Long emphasizes, the modern construct and study of religion depended on the extraction not just of material objects, but of ideas, concepts, and constructs. So, from Long's perspective, extraction forms not merely the geographical site of the production of modern religion, but, also, depends on extracted knowledge as well. Modern religion has been funded by and is founded on extraction.

If religion and environment discourses are going to take seriously the ways current environmental crises are not "unprecedented" so much as merely the next iteration in long histories of coloniality[21] and imperiality,[22] then starting from extractive zones can help orient our theorizing of both nature and religion to see these dynamics. After all, it is not just that 21st century climate change poses a moral problem that outstrips religions' moral imaginaries. Modern religion has itself been produced through the very conditions that brought about that current moral conundrum.

While neither Greening Religion nor Dark Green Religion approaches have sufficiently analyzed religion and nature in the context of extractive zones, there are aspects of both methodologies they could build from. Dark Green Religion could build from its call for closer attention to the historical construction of religion as outlined above. Greening Religion could build from its activist/participant and ethical orientation. Bron Taylor, the author of Dark Green Religion, is critical of Green Religions for their overly engaged, ethical, activist, and participant approach. He calls for a historical approach that "places the priority on simply understanding the relationships between Homo sapiens, their religions and other cultural dimensions, and their livelihoods, environmental, and so on."[23] Taylor clarifies that he is not advocating a "value-neutral" approach, but one that would "bracket value assumptions." Yet, given

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[20] Reid, "Introduction," in *With this Root About My Person: Charles H. Long & New Directions in the Study of Religion*, Jennifer Reid and Davíd Carrasco (eds), vii-xx. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020).

[21] The term, of course is Aníbal Quijano's and is the focus of decolonial work. Recent work within the energy humanities has focused on telling the story of climate emergency as a history of energy extraction rooted in the colonization and enslavement of sugar plantations (see Dominic Boyer, No More Fossils (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023). For his part, Amitav Ghosh weaves postcolonial and decolonial perspectives to re-narrate the history of climate emergency rooted in long histories of colonialism and extractivism in The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

[22] Mohamed Amer Meziane, The States of the Earth: An Ecological and Racial History of Secularization, trans. Jonathan Adjemian (New York: Verso, 2024). Thanks to J. Kameron Carter for alerting me to this text.

[23] Bron Taylor, "Critical Perspectives on 'Religions of the World and Ecology'" in Encyclopedia of Religion & Nature (London: Continuum, 2010), 1376.

the historical propensity for religion scholars—precisely in the mode of standing back and "simply understanding"—to engage in epistemological extraction as Long has emphasized, I would argue that religion and nature methods from extractive zones would require the value positionality of engaged, activist, justice-oriented, repair-driven, participant-observer approaches.[24] Furthermore, such an approach would also require a critical analysis and reassessment of Greening Religion's idealist tendency to resource religions (or even "mine" them) for improved environmental ethics.[25] In any case, the methods of a religion scholar in extractive zones could not find solace in any kind of onto-epistemology that would assume binaries between acting and knowing, feeling and thinking, or academy and activism.

There is much yet to be worked out in precisely articulating how a religion and environment scholar would be engaged as participant-observer committed to social-environmental justice but also avoid extracting knowledge and resourcing religion. As Willis Jenkins emphasizes in a 2009 review essay on the field of religion and ecology, the methodological differences between Greening Religion and Dark Green Religion track along lines that have divided (at least North American) religious studies from theological approaches.[26] From this perspective, the task for future religion and environment scholars marks a fundamental need to upend established disciplinary divides that have defined the study of a religion as a whole and reimagine religious/theological studies methods, this time self-consciously, critically, and responsively from extractive zones.

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[24] For more on these approaches, see Rowe, Sideris, and Zenner (forthcoming) as well as Joseph Witt, "Religion, Extraction, and Just Transition in Appalachia," Religions 15 (2024), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15101261.

[25] Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, "The Challenge of the Environmental Crisis," Religions of the World and Ecology Series Forward, https://fore.yale.edu/Publications/Books/Religions-World-and-Ecology-Book-Series/Challenge-Environmental-Crisis#10. Thanks to Evan Berry for pointing out a reliance on "mining" metaphors in religion and environment discourses (Berry, "Opening Comments" at the Workshop on Religion, Environmental Crises & Extractivism, Arizona State University, Feb. 5-6, 2023).

[26] Willis Jenkins, "Religion and Ecology: A Review Essay on the Field," Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 77.1 (2009): 187-97.

YOUR GREAT WORK: ADDRESS TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AT THE ALBUQUERQUE ACADEMY

Larry Rassmusen

The writing is on the wall. The wall itself is the north wall of the Santa Fe farmer's market, and the writing is Wendell Berry's from 2003: "To cherish what remains of Earth and foster its renewal is our only hope."[1] It could have been Terry Tempest Williams's two decades later. "Before we can save this world we are losing, we must first learn how to savor what remains."[2]

You—sophomores, juniors, seniors—have a Great Work before you. It's to cherish Earth's remains and renew it, to save what we are losing and savor what remains. Save and savor, cherish and renew, is your calling now, your vocation.

Your Great Work comes in two steps.

Step one is to become the very first generation to achieve sustainability for the planet.[3] That's how you renew the planet and save the world. My ancestors and my generation put us on the path of unsustainability by means of an extractive global economy powered by fossil fuels and high carbon lifestyles. This began a

[1] From Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace: Agrarian Essays*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Washington, DC, Counterpoint, 2003).

[2] Taken from the note on *The Comfort of Crows* in *The New York Times Book Review*, December 31, 2023: 22.

[3] Hannah Ritchie in conversation with Bill Gates. See the blog of Bill Gates, *Gates Notes*, "Climate Optimism with Hannah Ritchie." February 2, 2024. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/climate-optimism-hannah-ritchie-management-intelligence-suqbf .

couple hundred years ago with the Industrial Revolution and undertook a sharp acceleration after 1950 and post-WWII growth. It belongs to your talent, energy, dedication, and smarts to strike out on a different path.

But your Great Work is even more. It's a *civilizational* challenge. How many generations have the chance for a different civilization knocking on their front door? Yours does.

The Great Work is a phrase from Thomas Berry's *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*.[4] Berry says that every people and civilization has a Great Work.

> The Great Work of the classical Greek world [was] its understanding of the human mind and the creation of the Western humanist tradition; the Great Work of Israel [was] articulating a new experience of the divine in human affairs; the Great Work [of India was] to lead human thought into spiritual experiences of time and eternity and their mutual presence to each other. . . . In America the Great Work of the First Peoples was to occupy this continent and establish an intimate rapport with the powers that brought this continent into existence in all its magnificence.[5]

And your Great Work is to effect "the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans [are] present to the planet in a mutually beneficial, [reciprocal] manner."[6]

I talk with my grandkids about this. Let me share the Author's Note from my book of letters to them, *The Planet You Inherit: Letters to My Grandchildren When Uncertainty's a Sure Thing*.

> I knew my grandchildren confronted the harrowing challenge of moving from industrial to ecological civilization. The Great Transition, it's called. Epic times.
>
> I was ready for that. But my pen was startled to discover a truth that's taken us by stealth: That for the first time ever, humanity's become a geological force. We've slid off the back end of one geological epoch, the Holocene, onto the front end of another, the Anthropocene. The Age of the Human. Thus we face epoch times as well as epic times, and a further daunting transition.
>
> These transitions are the Great Work (Thomas Berry) that awaits my grandchildren. Though they were never asked and didn't get a vote, remapping and remaking the world amidst uncertainty is their calling, as

[4] Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).
[5] Ibid., 1-2.
[6] Ibid., 3.

> it is ours. While their world cannot be ours, and shouldn't be, I wanted to step away from an academic career teaching Social Ethics and just write love letters, love letters that face what they face on a changed and changing planet. I'm certain the letters are urgent. Not because the kids' grandparents are frail but because their world is.[7]

Let me put this to you the way I did to grandsons Eduardo and Martin: "What's patently unfair is that you, as Anthropocene kids, did not create the problems you're inheriting, yet you're forced to be responsible for them throughout your lives. The question is not whether you will have to confront climate catastrophe but how you will respond individually and collectively." I hope you find "your vocation, your calling, to remap the world on an altered Earth for a different way of life in an uncharted future." Giving yourself to that, "I suspect you will find yourself saying 'yes' to life in spite of everything."[8]

Photo by Steve Jewett on Unsplash

Recall Greta Thunberg. You already know she began the school strikes that became a movement of world youth. You also know she's been unrelenting about urgent action to confront climate calamity. Since her campaign always bore bad news about a worsening reality—a stark planetary emergency is upon us, she

[7] Larry Rasmussen, *The Planet You Inherit: Letters to My Grandchildren When Uncertainty's a Sure Thing* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2022), 7.

[8] Ibid., 39.

repeated over and over—people thought she herself must suffer her own message. Her response? "People seem to think I am depressed, or angry, or worried, but that's not true. It's like I get meaning in my life."[9] See, leading the charge in a great cause is exhilarating; it gives satisfaction and generates meaning. *You* get to write the next chapters and perhaps even finish the story.

What story? Let me remind you that the Stone Age did not end because we ran out of stones. It ended because the Bronze Age offered a better way of doing things. The Fossil Fuel Age will not end because we ran out of coal, oil and gas, either. It will end because the first generation to achieve sustainability chose renewable sources of energy and savored a renewed Earth.

But I want to hear from your generation. Here's how we'll do that. Ask yourself how your experience lines up with my granddaughter's. Liv Diers-Parsons is seventeen now but was sixteen when she performed her poem at the New York City book launch of *The Planet You Inherit*. She channels her 16-year-old view through a seven-year-old girl Liv has playing on her bedroom floor. Liv knows that most youth her age experience a lot of anxiety about their future. Some know anger and despair and have a sense of environmental doom in the offing. See where you find yourself as you listen to Liv's poem, titled "You Can't Shift the Stars":

> In her childhood dreams
> she holds onto the earth,
> stops the bleeding
> with her own two hands,
> a little girl sits on her bedroom floor
> head tilted towards the stars,
> and imagines she could shift them,
> reform the heavens into perfection,
> reshape the sky till it reflects a prettier world,
> maybe everyone is a god at seven years old.
>
> To the little girl dreaming of change from her bedroom floor,
> writing novels in your head
> between darkness and sleep
> because
> little girls' minds run wild
> and the world is so vast
> and you are so small
> and who will be there to save it

[9] Ibid., 39-40.

when it all burns down

Because it is burning isn't it?
the tv said it is
and mama can't explain
how they're going to fix it,
and you thought mama could mend anything?

You believed in perfection
and infinity.

It all seemed so clear from your bedroom floor:
just tell the leaders
to get down from their podiums
crawl on the floor till they remember their childhood
play in the dirt
pick the flowers
swing from the trees,
remind them what they're losing,
remind them what they're burning,
after all, who could look the earth in her eyes and tell her goodbye.

But you watch the tv
and the leaders are stuck at their podiums
and they have forgotten what it feels like
to be a child,
and you can never play god
and you will never shift the heavens.

But I hope you know
I carry your dreams in my lungs,
I breathe in deeply,
Your hope makes a home in my stomach
It hugs the tired parts of me
till they sprout new dandelions,

Did you know you are a garden?

You have watered yourself since childhood
painstakingly
with love and laughter

> even on the days,
> especially on the days,
> when hope feels impossible.
>
> There is a garden within you,
> there is a world within you,
> there is a galaxy within you,
> but it is up to you to find it.
>
> Take out your pen
> take out your paint brush
> take out your camera
> take out your megaphone
>
> and you will discover that the littlest things
> can be a revolution.
>
> You can't stop the bleeding
> you can't shift the stars
> but you will discover love is powerful
> our voices are powerful
> our stories are powerful
> we are powerful
> a little girl on her own can't reshape the universe
> but a movement sure can.

I could add that all three of my grandnieces have decided their morality does not allow them to bring children into this world.

I could pass along another voice as well. It's from grandson Eduardo, then seven years old. He gave what he called his "speech" right after Liv. He told me afterward that he was a little scared about speaking before so many people, but "I just pinched my buttocks and went for it." Here's what he said:

> Dear Grandpa, Thanks for sharing your wisdom in the letters you wrote to me and Spud. ["Spud" is my nickname for his brother.] I hope that wisdom flows through our blood. Some people on our planet are doing the best they can to save it. But climate change is bad. It was very interesting learning about your life. My life in the Anthropocene's decent, so far. I have recently been learning about the planet and geography, especially the Arctic and Antarctic… I hope they don't melt away.
> Love, Edward

> P. S. In the first chapter, Epoch Times, you write [that] I can't read it yet. But I'm already reading chapter books without pictures!

Eduardo and Liv's little girls are 2nd graders. I don't know about your 2nd grade but in mine we did not study melting ice caps or applaud people for trying to save the planet because climate change is bad. It never entered our minds that the planet itself was in need of saving, and we certainly never asked, "Who will be there to save it when it all burns down because it is burning isn't it? the tv said it is." Nor did we ever imagine that, at seven or sixteen, we could "look Earth in the eyes and tell her goodbye." We didn't imagine any of this because our planet wasn't the planet of our grandkids. Our planet wasn't yours.

Our time together in assembly is almost up. It might be helpful to mention what motivates people who live in extreme times amidst uncertainty, the uncertainty that will be home for you. What they know, like Thomas Berry knew, is that, in the long haul, we are all part of the journey of the universe, at home in a story billions of years in the making. And when they awaken to that, they are moved by wonder, awe, and love because they live in a timeless land of enchantment.

But people are also moved by fear, terror, and hate. Which will triumph? If you choose joy over despair and love over hate, it's because Earth offers joy and love and wonder daily.

I leave you confident that you will strive to save the planet and savor it, and that you will find your civilizational work meaningful, even exhilarating. There is no question you will face hard times and witness a broken world in tumult. For that you will need communities to carry both the pain and the joy. So, I close with a ritual you might consider.

Jews of the Middle Ages would ascend the Temple Mount in Jerusalem several times a year, turn to the right to begin circling the plaza counterclockwise. That circle voiced the blessings of the past year and sang gratitude for them. Meanwhile, the anxious, the brokenhearted and those mourning or grieving, ascended the Mount, turned to the left, and circled in the opposite direction. With one circle inside the other they met one another.

Those in the first circle would ask the despondent coming their way, "What happened to you?" The reply might be "My father died, and I never got to say what I wanted to him," or "My child is sick, and we don't know what's wrong," or "Fire and drought [or flood] wiped us out." The one in the other circle might reply, "You are not alone," then continue to walk for a while with the one in anguish. "Meet me next year and let's see which circle we're in. Meanwhile I will

hold your sorrow and grief with my love and in my prayers."[10]

I recently spent time with Fr. John Dear, an apostle of nonviolence. He was once talking with his friend and fellow priest Daniel Berrigan, an activist opponent of the Vietnam War and a crusader for civil rights and racial and class equality. Berrigan's words to Fr. Dear were, "John, you will always be up against forces of death and destruction and tragedy. All the more important, then, is living your life to the fullest in every moment. Savor that—and laugh a lot."

To be human means to be human in a world of pain, and in a world of meaning and joy. It means that your Great Work is to save and savor, cherish and renew.

Thank you. Be well.

[10] This ritual is reported by Rabbi Sharon Brous in "Two Lessons from an Ancient Text That Changed My Life," *The New York Times*, Sunday, January 21, 2024:10.

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Nancy Wright received a Master of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary, New Your City, a Master's Degree in Environmental Conservation Education from New York University, and a Doctorate of Ministry degree in Transformational Leadership, focused on watershed leadership, from Boston University School of Theology. She worked for a total of nine years at two ecumenical agencies with a focus on stewardship of Creation: CODEL (Coordination in Development), which fostered international leadership in sustainable development through thirty-eight Christian organizations, including Lutheran World Relief; and then, Earth Ministry, in Seattle. The Lutheran congregation she served in Burlington, Vermont, for sixteen years, created the Congregational Watershed Manual, https://vtipl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/CongregationalWatershedManual-InterreligiousEdition-Jan2019.pdf. Currently she is Pastor for Creation Care at the New England Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and a Certified Forest Therapy guide. She coauthored (with Fr. Donald Kill) *Ecological Healing: A Christian Vision* (Orbis, 1993) and articles on Christianity and Environmental Justice and Eco-Spirituality.

Twelve Understandings for the Ecozoic Era

The Nature of the Universe

1. ***The Unity of the Universe.*** The universe as a whole is an interacting community of beings inseparably related in space and time. From its beginning, the universe has had a psychic-spiritual as well as a physical dimension. The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.

2. ***Modes of Expression.*** The universe expresses itself at all levels through communion (intimacy, interrelatedness), differentiation (diversity), and subjectivity (interiority, self-organization).

3. ***Cosmogenesis.*** The universe is a creative, emergent, evolutionary reality that has developed and is still developing through a sequence of irreversible transformations.

Earth and Its Current Dilemma

4. ***Earth.*** Earth is a one-time endowment in the unfolding story of the universe.

5. ***The Current Dilemma.*** The effects of human activity on Earth have become so pervasive and invasive that the survival and health of the Earth community now rest on decisions being made and actions being taken by humans.

6. ***Transition to the Ecozoic Era.*** There is a need to move from the current technozoic period where Earth is seen as resource for the benefit of humans, to an Ecozoic era where the well-being of the entire Earth community is the primary concern.

Three Key Building Blocks

7. ***The New Story.*** The New Story, the narrative of the evolutionary development of the universe, offers a new understanding of the cosmos and of the role of humans in the universe process.

8. ***Bioregionalism.*** Bioregionalism, care for Earth in its naturally occurring, relatively self-supporting geo-biological divisions, reorients human activity in developing sustainable modes of living, building inclusive human community, caring for other species, and preserving the health of Earth on which all life depends.

9. ***Ecological Spirituality.*** Ecological Spirituality, presence to the primal mystery and value of Earth as a single sacred community, provides a basis for revitalizing religious experience, healing human psyches, and maintaining both diversity and unity in the emerging Earth community.

Special Contributors to the Ecozoic Era

10. ***Women, Indigenous People, Science, and Humanistic and Religious Traditions.*** The wisdoms of women, Indigenous people, science, and classical humanistic and religious traditions will have important roles to play in redefining concepts of value, meaning, and fulfillment, and in setting norms of conduct for the Ecozoic era.

11. ***The Earth Charter.**** The Earth Charter provides a comprehensive set of values and principles for the realization of the Ecozoic era.

The Great Work

12. ***The Great Work.*** The epic task, or "Great Work," of our time is to bring into being the Ecozoic era. It is a task in which everyone is involved and from which no one is exempt. On it the fate of Earth depends, and in it lies the hope of the future.

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*The Earth Charter may be viewed at www.EarthCharter.org

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