Touchstone

Volume 42 **October 2024** **Number 3**

Eco-Theology

Review

Editorial

Creation has always been a central concern of Christian theology and spirituality. In contrast to dualistic worldviews that sharply dichotomize God and the world, spirit and matter, the Bible portrays the physical world as the handiwork of a good and wise Creator. Creation declares "the glory of God" (Psalm 19) and God's "eternal power and divine nature [are] perceived . . . in things that have been made." (Romans 1:20) And we human beings, created of the dust of the earth (*adam*), bearing the imprint of God's image, are given responsibility to care for the earth, have the capacity to discern the divine with creation.

But, as we know, this is only the first aspect of the biblical understanding of our place within creation. The other side is our estrangement and alienation, not only from God, our neighbour and ourselves, but the created order. Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, condemned to survive by the sweat of their brow. Their descendants built cities and went to war, and so the sad and sorry spectacle of human history has gone.

But things really changed with the scientific revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries, when (European) humans, while continuing to see themselves as part of the created order, began to see unruly and hostile nature as something to be tamed, conquered and exploited for human benefit. Nutrition, sanitation and vaccination changed the existence of millions from the "nasty, brutish, solitary and short" state described by Thomas Hobbes. The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century blessed millions with prosperity and longevity. There is not question that human life is vastly different for us than it was even for our great-grandparents – longer, healthier and safer. Some, like Montreal-born Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker see our era as the best time in human history.

But along with the benefits have come steep costs which are beginning to be charged to account today as we live through the dire consequences of our ingenuity and inventiveness. Possibly too late, we being confronted with the hard truth that our Promethean subjugation of the natural world may well threaten the future of human life on the planet. Moreover, the benefits and costs of our degradation of the earth are not equitably distributed. Those who get the smallest slide of the fossil-fuel-based prosperity pie are suffering the severest after-effect. Moreover, the benefits and costs of our degradation of the earth are not equitably distributed. Those who get the smallest slide of the fossil-fuel-based prosperity pie are suffering the severest after-effect.

Eco-theology began to emerge as a distinct sub-discipline of Christian theology around sixty years ago in response to the ecological crisis. In this issue of *Touchstone,* five eco-theologians explore the light that the Gospel and our theological traditions can shed on our dire predicament.

Jessica Hetherington gives a comprehensive overview of the history ecotheology by decade, beginning in the 1960s. She clearly outlines how the priorities and emphases of ecotheology have evolved with the changing nature of the ecological crisis.

Sandra Severs offers a proposal for an urban-based eco-theology. There is a tendency, she argues, to dichotomize urban and non-urban contexts, treating the ecological crisis as affecting the "natural" world. But with more and more people living in cities, there is a need to cultivate particular spiritual practices within an urban context that lead to a deeper commitment to care for our fragile planet.

We chose to reprint Harold Wells' article from the September 2012 issue of *Touchstone* in which he looks at an impending "climate holocaust" through the biblical category of eschatological hope. Harold has added a postscript,, reflecting on where we stand twelve years later. Harold asks whether as Christians we can be "clear-eyed but hopeful" about the climate crisis that is bearing down on us.

Seoyoung Kim looks at the intersection of ecofeminism and eco-theology through the specific issue of water. Water is essential to survival, but secure sources of clean water are under threat. The impacts of water issues, she notes, fall disproportionately on women. She explores how the analyses of patriarchal and economic power contribute both to the oppression of women and the degradation of our most essential natural resource.

Christian Kulp examines three textual sources—the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Statement "Cultivate and Care," the novels and essays of Indian writer Amitav Ghosh, and Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Sí* as resources for creating a new "moral and theological imaginary" to guide and shape our response to the ecological crisis.

In our Profile section, Peter Wyatt has offered a fresh look at the life and legacy of Egerton Ryerson, a pivotal figure in the development of the public education system and Canadian Methodism, has been cast by some as a chief architect of the residential school system and the colonialist oppression of Indigenous people in Ontario. A major university and some United Churches have changed their names in response. Peter shows how

this verdict is not supported by the historical evidence and argues for a rehabilitation of Ryerson's reputation.

Due to space issues, we are omitting our "From the Heart" section. This issue of *Touchstone* is rounded out, as always, by a book review. I hope you read it with pleasure and profit.

What's Next?

The *Touchstone* Board has set themes for 2025 In February, we will mark the 80th anniversary of the death of German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in April 1945. Bonhoeffer's work and witness continues to exert a powerful influence on Christian theology eight decades after his murder by the Nazis.

In June 2025, we will (of course) observe the centennial of the United Church of Canada, reflecting on our past and present, and what the future might hold for our church in these challenging times.

The October 2025 issue will be devoted to the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicea, which clarified the nature of Jesus Christ and laid the groundwork for a fully formed doctrine of the Trinity.

We need *book reviews.* If you would have a book to recommend for reviewing, or if you would like to write a review, please contact our Book Review Editor, Lorraine Diaz at *ldiaz@centralunitedchurch.com*.

Comments are always welcome. Email me at *paulridleymiller@gmail.com.* If you have questions about your subscription, please contact our Subscription Manager, Kate Young, at *MaryKatharineYoung@outlook.com*.

Thank you, Judi!

Judi Elmer has retired after years as *Touchstone* treasurer. Judi is one of many behind-the-scenes volunteers who keep our little journal going by paying the bills and balancing the books. We look forward to working with our new treasurer Jim Graham.

Paul Miller
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A RICH INTELLECTUAL TRADITION: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD OF ECOTHEOLOGY

by Jessica Hetherington

Ecotheology, as a self-defined discipline, has been around for more than 60 years—a timeline which coheres with the emergence of the climate and ecological crisis into general consciousness in the 1960s. Despite this lineage, I often encounter people who are surprised to learn that the Christian church has been engaging academically with the problem of the climate and ecological crisis for decades. It is to the detriment of both the church and its people that the rich well of clearly articulated and well-grounded ecotheology is unfamiliar to many, particularly in our time when the need to respond to the climate and ecological crisis is so urgent.

In the following pages then, I offer a short overview of the field of ecotheology, highlighting key ideas and scholars who have helped develop the discipline. While the examples I present are by no means exhaustive, my intent is to provide you with key insights that can spark your own interest and invite you to do further research into areas that pique your interest.

The Chronological Arc of Ecotheology

Ecotheology, a shortened term for "ecological theology," is the study of theology in light of the ecological crisis. Ecotheology has, at its root, an explicit concern for the ecological crisis facing the planet and its inhabitants, and an explicit sense of responsibility for responding to the crisis. There is a bias within ecotheology toward a concern for ecological degradation and the need to heal, solve, or mitigate human-caused ecological disruptions. Not all theology that engages the question of the natural world and humanity's relationship to it fits within the field of ecotheology; it must have concern for the ecological crisis at its core to fit within this discipline.

Ecotheology seeks to make sense of things in two ways. It strives to understand the climate and ecological crisis through the lens of faith, meaning doctrine and ethics, tradition and worship, biblical study, and more. It also seeks to interpret religious tradition in light of the ecological

crisis, particularly the ethical, moral, and religious demands that the crisis makes on people of faith.[1]

In the course of my academic research within ecotheology, I discovered a striking chronological pattern to the development of the field. I noticed that the way that ideas were formed and then developed could be identified roughly by decade. Highlighting this chronological arc since its inception in the 1960s offers a sense of the discipline overall; it also highlights the potential for ecotheology, as it moves into the hands of church leaders, grassroots activists, and ordinary people of faith, to offer an effective response to the climate and ecological crisis, especially as we sit at the precipice of climate catastrophe.

1960s: Raising the Cry of Alarm

It was in the 1960s when scientists began to raise the alarm about various aspects of the planet's natural world being under threat. As the ecological crisis entered public awareness in a broad way, so too it entered the academy, and theologians began to respond. The cry of alarm regarding the ecological crisis was first raised by American historian Lynn White, Jr. In his article, "The Historical Roots of the Ecologic Crisis," White argues that the roots of the ecological crisis lie within the Jewish and Christian religious traditions. His central argument is bold: "Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen."[2] His suggestion, that the root of the problem is a Christian worldview of dominance over the natural world, caused a firestorm within Christian theology. While many scholars stepped forward to defend the Christian tradition against the charges, others readily agreed, and still others chose to take a more nuanced approach and examine the challenge more closely.

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[1] It should be noted that ecotheology, as a discipline, exists within many different religious traditions. This essay explores Christian ecotheology as it has emerged from the 1960s. If you are interested in learning more about what such religions as Buddhism, Islan, Taoism, Indigenous spiritualities, and others have to say on the climate and ecological crisis, I invite you to begin by exploring the book series published by the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions. *https://fore.yale.edu/Publications/Books/Religions-World-and-Ecology-Book-Series.*

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

Joseph Sittler was one such measured theologian, who had been expressing concern for the earth in Christian thought, without fanfare, since 1962. In his work he argues that the dualism that was prevalent within Christianity at the time, of a split between nature and grace, was a false one. It is necessary, he argues, to bring them back together if we are to properly understand Christian faith, how we are to follow Jesus, and how we are to act in the world. This early statement by Sittler offers a profound way of understanding our Christian obligations:

> The care of the earth, the realm of nature as a theatre of grace, the ordering of the thick, material procedures that make available to or deprive [humanity] of bread and peace—these are Christological obediences before they are practical necessities.[3]

Sittler's challenge to Christianity is more nuanced than White's and presents comprehensive and incisive theological grounds for remedying the problem. Sittler's work was quite prescient, presenting themes that would be developed in later decades by other scholars, themes such as nature, grace, history, and the shift in human-nature relations that occurred during the Enlightenment.

1970s: Defining the Problem

The very first Earth Day was celebrated in the United States on April 22, 1970, sparking the beginning of the contemporary global environmental movement. The 1970s is also the decade when ecotheology began to develop as a self-aware, defined discipline. Most of the scholars who started writing during this time would later go on to become leading ecotheologians. What begins to be recognized at this early juncture is that there is a real complexity to the challenge of responding theologically to the problem of ecological degradation. Scholars tackle this complexity in a variety of ways, including revisionism, process thought, and the engagement of science with religion.

A more nuanced approach to defining the problem of the ecological crisis than alleged by White emerged in the form of revisionism. Revisionist H. Paul Santmire suggests, for example, that theologians have

[3] Joseph A. Sittler, "Called to Unity," *Ecumenical Review* 14, no. 2 (January 1962): 186.

inadvertently contributed to the charge of Christian anthropocentrism by ignoring nature, and that in the American context there is a warring relationship with nature that swings back and forth between adoration and exploitation. To restore human relationship with the natural world, Santmire works with the doctrine of the Kingdom of God to develop a theology of nature based upon three motifs that human beings can employ for the human relationship to the world: overlord, caretaker and wondering onlooker.[4]

Not all theologians in the 1970s disagreed with White. John Cobb was one of the first theologians to concur with White's charge of Christian anthropocentrism and offer a corrective. He is also one of the first to recognize that it is not sufficient to gloss over the harsh details of the climate and ecological crisis with a blithe comment such as "we all know what the problems are." Cobb defines the problem of the ecological crisis in its specificity, range and diversity, and notes the relationships among science, technology, religion, and nature in the global North. More than stewardship, Cobb requires a new commitment to the other-than-human world.[5]

Drawing on process theology, Cobb's work anticipates many themes that later emerged in ecotheology: the relationship between ecology and social justice; the need for consumption reduction in the global North, and the role of worldview in both the problem and the solution. Cobb wrote more than 50 years ago:

> Now, however, it is important for us to extend the range of respect and concern to nonhuman forms of life. But we cannot simply do this as an act of will. We can do it only as our vision, our sense of reality, changes. This will change only as we become vividly aware of kinship with other living things. We must come to experience ourselves as part of that whole community of living things to which we point by speaking of the evolutionary process.[6]

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[4] H. Paul Santmire, *Brother Earth: Nature, God and Ecology in a Time of Crisis* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1970).

[5] John B. Cobb Jr., *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology,* rev. Ed. (Denton, TX: Environmental Ethics Books, 1995), 70. It was first published in 1972 by Benzinger, Bruce & Glencoe.

[6] Ibid., 51.

This remarkable statement took decades to take hold. Indeed, this vision still strikes some people as surprising within Christian circles today.

1980s: The Big Picture in Ecotheology

The 1980s was a watershed decade in the climate and ecological crisis; environmental issues were becoming more apparent and the environmental movement was in full swing. Within the physical and social sciences, theories were developing to understand the Earth as a whole living system. Within ecotheology, attention turned to large-scale questions regarding the role of world, both in contributing to the ecological crisis as well as being able to respond, and the need to develop theologies of nature. The 80s can be described as a time of exploring the "big picture" in ecotheology, asking large epistemological questions that would later frame questions of ethics and praxis.

Theologies of Nature

Worldview and Theologies of Nature

Early in the field of ecotheology, scholars recognized a relationship between the ecological crisis and how human beings view the natural world, its relationship to themselves and to God. This raises the question of worldview, — "the basic interpretive stories of who we are, what nature is, where we have come from, and where we are going.[11]" Worldview became a centrally important in understanding the problem of human destruction of the Earth.

Worldview informs action. Many ecotheologians came to see the ecological crisis as a spiritual crisis, emerging from a disordered worldview, wherein human beings see themselves as divorced from and superior to the rest of the natural world.

In later years, ecotheologians such as Heather Eaton[12] and I have argued a nuanced distinction. At its fundamental level, the ecological crisis is about the ways in which the Earth and its life systems have been degraded by human activities, manifesting in the very concrete consequences of habitat loss, widespread species extinction, soil, air and water pollution, and climate change. This *is* a spiritual crisis with respect to our understanding of ourselves, the natural world, and God. Understanding the role of worldview in the ecological crisis is paramount for ecotheologians.

From this understanding of worldview, several theologians began to systematically explore what a theology of nature might look like. Theologies of nature can be defined as interpretation, and sometimes reformulation, of doctrine based upon insights gained from science. While there are theologies of nature within the science-religion conversation that are not necessarily concerned with the ecological crisis, environmental degradation is the focus of theologies of nature within ecotheology.

Sallie McFague is perhaps the most significant ecotheologian to offer a theology of nature that takes into account the need for a new worldview. She argues for a metaphor of the universe as the body of God, and develops a systematic ecotheology that explores what that can mean for our understanding of how we do theology, as well as central theological areas such as anthropology, soteriology and ethics.[7] She challenges the discipline further by asking what it would mean if we love nature as our neighbour.[8]

In this decade, the question of worldview also took on cosmological dimensions. The idea of a new cosmology developed, drawing on scientific discoveries about the emergent universe. This new cosmology explores a more comprehensive worldview than that on which modern science has been based. One scholar who developed the notion of cosmology as worldview is cultural historian Thomas Berry. Berry's work presents a richly layered understanding of humanity and our place in the universe, and the central importance of worldview to our being and acting on the Earth. He argues for what he calls "a functional cosmology":

> …that will provide the mystique needed for this integral earth-human presence. Such a mystique is available once we consider that the universe, the earth, the sequence of living forms, and the human mode of consciousness have from the beginning had a psychic-spiritual as well as a physical-material aspect.[9]

Berry's belief is that the ecological crisis has come about in part because humans have lost a guiding story that helps them understand themselves in the scheme of things. The current prevailing cosmology is

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[7] Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

[8] Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

[9] Thomas Berry, *Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 66.

presupposes a radical discontinuity from the rest of the natural world, where humans see ourselves as somehow separate from the life systems of the planet, with all rights given to them.[10] Berry's remedy is to create a theology of nature *writ large,* presenting a postmodern understanding of the emergent universe, which locates the Earth and humanity within a 13.8-billion-year history of becoming, as a *story* by which humans can reorient ourselves, find a sense of home on the Earth, and begin to create new ethics and institutions that are enhancing to both the natural world and humanity.

1990s: Era of Ethical Questions

Environmental issues were in the headlines regularly in the early 1990s and the environmental movement was strong around the world. April 20, 1990 marked the 20th anniversary of Earth Day. In addition to such issues as air and soil pollution, the 90s were marked by growing awareness about climate change.

It is not surprising that the 90s witnessed an explosion of thought on all aspects of the ecological crisis and their implications for ecotheology. I consider the 90s to be the *heyday* of ecotheology. The issues raised during those years and the intersections that developed formed the foundation of later work. Dozens of full length books and countless academic articles on ecotheology published in this time period.

Commitment to addressing the ecological crisis, the recognition of the importance of worldview and theologies of nature as the larger context became the basis for addressing questions of theological ethics and considering contextual perspectives.

Eco-Justice

One ethical theme that emerged in the 1990s was eco-justice, which regards the ecological crisis as a social justice issue. The term "eco-justice," coined by Dieter Hessel, reflects the understanding that "justice to the deprived and care for nature are two sides of the same ethic of eco-justice."[11]

Economics is a central principle in eco-justice— the need for economic justice for the poor around the globe and for ecologically

[10] Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 4.

[11] Dieter T. Hessel, "Eco-Justice in the Eighties," in *Energy Ethics: A Christian Response,* ed. Dieter T. Hessel (New York: Friendship Press, 1979), 8.

sustainable economic models. According to Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether: "Sound Christian environmental thought and practice builds on the revisioning of theology by social justice movements and it deepens them by placing them in the context of ecological crisis."[12]

Ecotheology brings economics and ecology together with the stated commitments of justice for both humans and the Earth community at the core of the intersection.

Ecofeminism

Ecotheology sparked engagement with other specific aspects of social including ecofeminism. Ecofeminism argues that the degradation of the Earth and gender-based oppression are related. First articulated as a concept by Rosemary Radford Ruether in 1975,[13] it is in the 90s that ecofeminist theology is systematically developed, with the work of Ruether, Anne Primavesi, and others. Primavesi argues for an ecofeminist theological paradigm versus the traditional hierarchical method of theology and ethics.[14] Ruether helps to deepen the ecofeminist theological understanding through an exploration of the history of patriarchal and ecological domination in Christianity. She searches the traditions for resources to heal gender-based oppression and the Earth community.[15]

While ecofeminist theory is based upon the relationship between ecological devastation and gender-based oppression, how that relationship is understood varies among ecofeminist scholars. Among the diversity of ecofeminist theologies, several levels of analysis can be identified. There is the *cultural-symbolic* level, which explores the ways in which patriarchal cultures have defined women as being "closer to nature," as being on the nature side of a nature-culture hierarchical split.

The second level examines the *socio-economic* underpinnings of the interconnection between the domination of women's bodies and women's work and the treatment of land and animals as resources to be exploited.[19] Later scholarship has identified a third level of ecofeminist

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[12] Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Introduction," in *Christianity and Ecology,* xxxvi.

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

[14] Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity* (Tunbridge Wells, UK: Burns & Oates, 1991).

[15] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

analysis. Which combines the cultural-symbolic and socio-economic approaches, overcoming the weaknesses of using only one approach. [16]

Liberation Theology

Liberation theology is a third ethical theme that came to prominence in the 1990s. Leonardo Boff brings the issue of ecology to an audience of Latin American and liberation theologians, countering arguments that ecology and concern for the natural world was the preserve of a privileged Western elite, against the reality of the global and social reach of the ecological crisis. Boff's main concern is the impact of the ecological crisis on the poor and the way in which the same logic of power and control over human communities has contributed to the damage of the natural world[17]

While the complex intersection of the climate crisis and its disproportionate impact on the poor is familiar today, it took a while for these realities to impact the environmental movements in the global North. The work from ecotheologians in the 90s was critical.

Diverse Perspectives and Contexts

As ethical concerns in ecotheology continued to develop and expand in the 1990s, the importance of varying perspectives and particular contexts to religious reflection on the ecological crisis become more apparent. The predominantly Western perspective of ecotheology was challenged by ecotheologians from the global South. Two edited collections from that time highlight the range of issues. In *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, biblical stories are used to bear witness to ecological disaster in the Philippines; the ecofeminist vision of women fighting the loss of forests in India is discussed; and a Native American theology of place is presented.[18] In *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion,* feminism and ecology are brought into conversation in the context of the global South.[19]

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[16] Heather Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 33.

[17] Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm,* trans. John Cumming (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

[18] David G. Hallman, *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994). See essays by Jose Pepz M. Cunanan, Aruna Gnanadason and George Tinker.

[19] Ruether, *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996).*

In particular, Ivone Gebara, a Brazilian ecofeminist theologian, brings sustained attention to the question of feminist theology and ecology within the global South.[20] Her work is distinctive in that it joins ecofeminist theory with liberation theology for a more fulsome treatment. Writing from the urban *barrios* of Brazil where she lives and works, Gebara develops a trinitarian theology that begins from human experience and recognizes the multi-religious reality of many people of the South.

2000s: Deepening Dialogue

As the world moved into the new millennium, global warming continued to rise precipitously and warnings from the scientific community and the environmental movement grew louder and more dire. In this increasingly complex context, ecotheology became increasingly interdisciplinary in its approach. Scholars discover that, by bringing several disciplines into conversation with ecotheology, insights would emerge that would otherwise have been unattainable. Mary Gray is an example of someone whose work engages multiple disciplines. She joins ecofeminist theology with the study of globalization and the work that she has done with Dalit women in India. For Grey, an ecotheological lens highlights a spirituality of consumerism that is promoted within economic globalization; she suggests theological themes that can assist in the resistance against the negative effects of globalization.[21]

In the new millennium, the influence of science and science-religion dialogues, such a distinct marker of the field of ecotheology, continues. The early 2000s saw an increase in the number of science-based questions pursued by ecotheologians, including the work of John Haught on evolution[6] and Anne Primavesi on earth systems science.[22]

2010s: The Turn to the Pragmatic in Ecotheology

Now firmly established in the 21st century ecotheologians shifted their attention to questions of a more pragmatic nature about how to transform

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[20] Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999).

[21] Mary C. Grey, *Sacred Longings: The Ecological Spirit and Global Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

[22] Anne Primavesi, *Gaia's Gift: Earth, Ourselves and God After Copernicus* (London: Routledge, 2003); *Gaia and Climate Change: A Theology of Gift Events* (London: Routledge, 2009).

the insights from five decades of ecotheology into concrete change on behalf of the Earth community.

This is the time period in which I defended my dissertation, which argued that climate and ecological action ought to be seen as Christian discipleship.[23] My work joins that of other scholars in placing our attention on how the rich ideas of ecotheology could make a concrete impact upon the world.

These more pragmatic questions which place *a priori* emphasis on how ideas are manifested in concrete conditions could not have been asked without the important contributions of those who helped build the field of ecology and theology in the first place. This later turn, just like the previous developments that I have identified, emerges from the foundation built by earlier scholars.

Like me, Anna Peterson and John O'Keefe express concern for ecologically sustainable practices that cohere with one's stated values. Peterson argues that when one's actions contradict one's beliefs, underlying values operate at cross purposes with environmental concerns.[24] She examines the complexity of the relationship between values and action and suggests that "we need to change our talk and our walk together."[25] O'Keefe recognizes how difficult ecologically sustainable living is, "and for us to be willing to adopt sustainable practices, we need to have some conviction about why we should be doing them at all."[26] He suggests that the lifestyle changes needed for ecological sustainability can be interpreted as Christian spiritual practices that can

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[23] Jessica Hetherington, *Ecological Praxis as Discipleship: Developing a Model of Praxis from Sallie McFague's Theological Call for Consumption Reduction,* Faculty of Theology, Saint Paul University, 2013. *https://ocul-uo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UO/5lqjs2/alma991022920469705161.*

[24] Anna L. Peterson, "Talking the Walk: A Practice-Based Environmental Ethic as Grounds for Hope," in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth,* ed. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 45-62.

[25] Ibid., 54.

[26] John O'Keefe, "Spiritual Practice and Sustainability: Resources from Early Christian Monasticism," in *Spirit and Nature: The Study of Christian Spirituality in a Time of Ecological Urgency,* ed. Timothy Hessel-Robinson and Ray Maria McNamara, R.S.M. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 63.

reveal an eschatological hope and help those who engage in the practice become more aware of God's presence.[27]

Other scholars are engaging with environmental practices to ask questions about the ecological crisis and human response. Daniel Spencer explores the theological and philosophical implications of ecological restoration for configuring human place in the world, calling for a "theologically grounded restoration ethic [that] returns the restoration of integrity in both human-divine and human social relationships, but expands these to include the earth and reframes them ecologically."[28]

Ecotheology Today: The Call of the Climate Emergency

From the vantage-point of the mid-2020s, I do not have a long view to identify overarching themes within the field of ecotheology. However, in the decade in which we live, the climate and ecological crisis itself takes precedence over any theme. As ecotheology continues to evolve and respond to the climate and ecological crisis, the call of the climate emergency has taken centre stage. We don't need to look for an organizing "theme" to ecotheology in this time; it has been handed to us by accelerating global heating and its devastating consequences around the world.

The authors whose work graces my desk now are taking the rich repository of 60 years of scholarship and focusing more acutely on the existential crisis of our time. Sallie McFague, who wrote throughout the 2000s on climate change and ecotheology, had her final book published posthumously in 2021, exploring climate change within the context of Christology and the call to kenosis.[29] Timothy Beal, in *When Time is Short: Finding Our Way in the Anthropocene,* dares to ask what it means to live when we know we, as a species, are dying.[30]

The most recent volume I am reading is *Decolonizing Ecotheology: Indigenous and Subaltern Challenges,* edited by S. Lily

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[27] Ibid., 66.

[28] Daniel T. Spencer, "Restoring Earth, Restored to Earth: Toward an Ethic for Reinhabiting Place," in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth,* ed. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 428.

[29] Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Christology: Kenosis, Climate Change, and Befriending Nature* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2021).

[30] Timothy Beal, *When Time is Short: Finding Our Way in the Anthropocene* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2022).

Mendoza and George Zachariah. This exciting book brings the ecological challenge into the academy. How do we decolonize our ways of knowing and learning in order to build a world of healing and justice for both the Earth and its peoples? The 60-year trajectory of ecotheology challenges the discipline to continue and deepen the work of becoming even more intersectional and intentional in advocating for an intellectual, spiritual and personal response to the crisis we face.

Ultimately, the work of theology is to ask: How does our faith help us to understand the world, and in so doing, to act in the ways that God calls us, with love, justice and compassion?

The insights of ecotheology are more necessary today than ever. As we seek to motivate people of faith, both in the pews and beyond, it is important to recognize that ideas drive action. In order to respond with the efficacy, and urgency that the climate and ecological crisis demands, we need good ideas to drive good action. The past six decades of ecotheology have produced many good ideas. What matters, ultimately, is to see that those ideas lead to good action in the world. That is the next step in the field of ecotheology.

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD AS YOURSELF: STEPS TOWARD AN ECO-THEOLOGY OF THE CITY

by Sandra Severs

At the heart of the coming environmental revolution is a change in values, one that derives from a growing appreciation of our dependence on nature. Without it there is no hope. In simple terms, we cannot restore our own health, our sense of well-being unless we restore the health of the planet.[1]

I am writing these words today as the town of Jasper burns. Maligne Lodge has been lost. The iconic Jasper Park Lodge has mostly survived but the extent of the damage is not yet clear. Closer to home, the town of Golden has been under evacuation alert and the area around Slocan Lake is ablaze. The BC Forest Fire map shows large parts of the province and neighbouring Alberta are on fire. Three weeks from now we are heading east on a road trip to Ontario. How will our drive through smoky British Columbia and Alberta go?

Summer forest fires are an ever-increasing part of our summer experience. And not only in the months we call summer. Last year the rains did not return to Vancouver Island until late October. The season of vulnerability is stretching wider and wider as weather patterns change with the increasing instability of the global climate.

Forest fires are only one issue we are dealing with. We have a sense that we are in what Thomas Homer-Dixon, founder of the Cascadia Institute at Royal Roads University, calls a "global polycrisis. It's not just one crisis."[2]

It's not just one crisis. It is how those crises interact with each other to make matters worse. The list of worrying things happening feels endless and we fear we are in over our heads. Political leaders attempt to capitalize on our fears by promising that, in the next election, they will make things better. But a careful reading of the situation makes us suspect that our leaders and institutions are struggling to adequately respond. The issues are so complex no one has a clear idea of the path forward. The result is a

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[1] Lester Brown, "Ecopsychology and the Environmental Revolution," in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth/Healing the Mind,* ed. Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes and Allen D. Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books,1995), xvi.

[2] Richard Heinberg and Asher Miller*, "Welcome to the Great Unravelling – Navigating the Polycrisis of Environmental and Social Breakdown,"* Post Carbon Institute, June 2023*, https://www.postcarbon.org/issue/the-great-unraveling/, 8.*

decline of trust in politicians and a rise of polarization on social media, which combine to make the public cynical about leaders and solutions. Mental health and addictions issues are increasingly difficult to manage. Many of us live with increasing levels of social anxiety and economic insecurity. We seem ill-equipped to deal with the nature of the changes before us. And it is clear the stresses and strains are going to get worse before they will/might hopefully get better.

At their heart, all the issues facing us are ecological ones. The interconnected systems of the natural world are the source from which we find the possibility of life. How we structure our economies, how we treat those who find themselves unhoused, how we create community together and how we interact with the wildness of nature are all ecological issues. Our failure to recognize this interconnectedness and our absolute dependency is, at its heart, a spiritual issue. In this time, when what we have been doing clearly no longer works, what is needed is a change in our relationship to the world around us.

Specifically, we need a new way of thinking about our relationship to cities because cities are where most of us live. According to the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 82% of North Americans live in urban areas.[3] While our scriptural record might describe pastoral scenes and our metaphors arise out of ancient rural practices, the reality is that most Canadians live in urban areas. Our theology in this coming time must be explicitly and responsively urban. It must acknowledge the context in which it is already being written. According to Andrew Davey:

> If all theology, as a form of human production, is contextual, then almost all theology must be urban—coming out of those urban academic institutions, the university and seminary. But their context of activity is rarely acknowledged, and rarely does such activity attempt to change the setting in which it takes place.[4]

While great nature writers like Mary Oliver, Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez and Wendell Berry write about encounters with the sacred in places

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[3] *https://www.un.org/uk/desa/68-world-population-projected-live-urban-areas-2050-says-un.*

[4] Andrew Davey, *Urban Christianity and Global Order – Theological Resources for an Urban Future* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 11.

of wildness, we need to have conversations about the sacred in our urban areas. We cannot restore the health of the planet unless we talk about the health of cities. The future of urban areas will largely determine how well we adapt to the realities of climate change as well as how we deal with issues of food security, economic disparities and increasing loss of biodiversity. Cities are where life-changing/planet-changing decisions are made. And it is here, in cities, that an urban ecotheology needs to speak. We need an eco-theology that focuses not only on our experience of and emotional attachment to wilderness but one that also focuses on what it is to be human, in community, in the city.

I am a white settler living on the traditional territories of the L'kwungen speaking people known as the Songhees and Esquimalt nations. I live in the Downtown neighbourhood of the City of Victoria. My neighbourhood is characterized by bright lights, siren noise, visible signs of poverty, great restaurants, busy nightlife, cruise ship tourism, limited parks and tree canopy, and concrete. It is a vibrant place to live. Seven years ago, we left North Vancouver and embraced Island living. Having lived in suburban houses for most of our adult lives, we chose apartment living as close to the centre of the city as possible. We chose it for all of the amenities the city offers as well as for its walkability. We did not know Victoria very well before we came here to live. Getting to know the city and developing an eco-theological lens through which to understand this place has become increasingly important to me.

Matthew Eggemeier, in his article "Ecology and Vision: Contemplation as Environmental Practice," describes three elements of the Christian contemplative tradition which provide direction for how such an eco-theology might be developed—attentiveness, kenosis, and the cultivation of a way of seeing that perceives the presence of God in the world.[5] While he focuses on the writings of Annie Dillard, Mary Oliver and poet Tim Lilburn, who write primarily about rural or wilderness contexts, his insights can be adapted for the urban context.

> While this focus on contemplative practice is often dismissed as an impractical and apolitical activity in the face of environmental concerns, this criticism is misguided. Specifically, it fails to recognize the fact that the way we see the world shapes our ethical action in the

[5] Matthew T. Eggemeier, "Ecology and Vision: Contemplation as Environmental Practice." *Worldviews* 18, no. 1 (2014): 54–76. *http://www.jstor.org/stable/43809504,* 56.

> world. Thus, environmental writers like Oliver and Lilburn correctly argue that the work of learning to see the natural world with contemplative attention is a spiritual act that is not only significant in its own right, but also can serve to engender ethical action in the world.[6]

One of the best ways of cultivating a spiritual practice of paying attention is through walking. Rebecca Solnit writes: "I suspect that the mind, like the feet, works at about three miles per hour. If this is so, then modern life is moving faster than the speed of thought, of thoughtfulness."[7] Walking, with no purpose other than the experience of the walk itself, frees the mind to pay attention to what is around it. As Solnit writes so eloquently: "The magic of the street is the mingling of the errand and the epiphany…"[8]

We walk through our neighbourhood daily, along the waterfront and under the Johnson Street Bridge, past the man trying to make friends with the Canada geese, past the mighty Empress Hotel and the Legislature, through the historic neighbourhood of James Bay, along Dallas Road on the oceanfront and back up Government Street among the crowds of tourists. We see the storefronts change as businesses continue to recover from COVID. Three new ice cream shops have opened on Government Street in the past two months! We see familiar buskers—the man in the kilt with his bagpipes attempting to drown out the sound of the Carillon, Darth Fiddler with his Star Wars costume, and the man claiming to be Irish Jamaican who occasionally sings a Bob Marley tune before returning to his trumpet. Becoming attentive is a long-term process. After walking by for seven years, this summer we realized that there are Garry Oaks in our neighbourhood. They are a tiny remnant of the original Garry Oak forests that once covered this part of the southern Island. The survivors can be seen in archival photographs and were here when the first settlers came to this part of the Island.

Recently I was at an open-air concert at tiny Reeson Park in the Inner Harbour. Brianna Bear, from the Songhees Nation, opened the concert with a territorial welcome. Although I have heard Brianna welcome settlers to the territory many times, this was the first time I *heard* her. Maybe it was because I was sitting in my lawn chair overlooking the

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[6] Ibid., 56.

[7] Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2000), 11.

[8] Ibid., 193.

water of the Gorge Inlet. Maybe it was because the sun was in my eyes and I couldn't be distracted by the cute little water taxis returning to their docks for the night. Maybe it was because I was tired, and it was evening . . . but *I heard her*. I heard her welcome us to *the place where the people smoked herring*. In that moment I realized that part of knowing my neighbourhood is also knowing how the water and the land connect. I don't know these waters. Other than riding the BC Ferry to the Mainland, I haven't been on the ocean in the 27 years I have lived in British Columbia. *Where are the herring*? *How can I love this neighbourhood if I don't know what happened to the herring? How can this land be healthy if we are not connected to the herring?*

For Mary Oliver, contemplative attention is essential to learning to love the world.

> Instructions for a living life:
> *Pay attention.*
> *Be astonished.*
> *Tell about it.*[9]

To contemplate is to notice, to see, to observe at a deeper level. It is a noticing free of time constraints and superficial glances that make a record in the mind as though checking off a box on a form. It is a noticing without pre-determined outcomes. It is a commitment to slowing down, to "tarrying." In describing the experience of going to an art gallery, Hans-Georg Gadamer writes that in order to see art one must dwell in its presence in a specific way: "When we dwell upon the work, there is no tedium involved, for the longer we allow ourselves, the more it displays its manifold riches to us. The essence of our temporal experience of art is in the learning how to tarry in this way. And perhaps it is the only way that is granted to us finite beings to relate to what we call eternity."[10] So too when we contemplate the neighbourhoods we have chosen to live in. What do we see when we take the time to really look?

In my neighbourhood, I see the colonial record of settlers preserved in the buildings of bricks and mortar that are much loved by the tourists. I see the statues of Queen Victoria, and the explorers Vancouver and Quadra overlooking our human activity. The signs of Indigenous

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[9] Mary Oliver, *Devotions – The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 105.

[10] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 45.

presence in the stories and uses of the land are harder to locate. There are art installations by Indigenous artists but the management of the land through the use of fire in the Garry Oak forests no longer occurs. We are afraid of fire. This is no longer the place where people come to smoke the herring, but there are efforts underway to improve the health of the waterways so the herring will return. Street names are starting to change and an Indigenous-designed plaza is planned for the refresh of Government Street. A spot to dock Songhees' canoes is clearly identified in the Inner Harbour. I see evidence of the Johnson Creek in the slope of certain Downtown parking lots. The mouth of the creek still flows into the Gorge Waterway although now preserved in a concrete culvert under the Johnson Street Bridge and only visible to those who know where to look for it. The wetlands, where it once found its source, are now hidden under an intersection, the water flow mostly diverted south instead of west, the surface covered in paving and buildings. I see the diversity of people who live here and how urban poverty is concentrated in Indigenous people who make up 30% of the folk who are unhoused on their traditional territory. I see how plants still insist on pushing up through cracks in the pavement despite the best efforts of the engineering and parks departments to manage nature.

I see this and more. When I am paying attention in this way, I know that the murder of crows that spend the summer nights in the trees in front of our building will leave as soon as the leaves finish dropping. They will find a secret (to me) location in the city to spend the winter. And they will not return to the hornbeams until Spring when the leaves are out sufficiently to hide them from predators. I know which streets are wind tunnels near the ocean and, from bitter experience, when to firmly hold onto my hat. I know where to look for wild roses blooming in parking lots and when the sea otters are likely to sleep on the docks in the Inner Harbour. I know that deer have their own pathways in the landscape. We call it Superior Street but how do they teach the geography of that ancient pathway to their offspring?

In writing about ethics, Iris Murdoch proposes an approach that is markedly different from the dominant model which views ethical decision-making as a free and sovereign choice made by an individual moral agent.[11] Murdoch argues that ethical decision-making has to do with how one sees the world. Prior to any ethic decision-making, there exists a worldview out of which choices are evaluated and weighted. This worldview shapes the choices we make in specific, concrete situations. Different moralities,

[11] Eggemeier, "Ecology and Vision", 57.

therefore, have less to do with different choices and more to do with different visions of the world: "we differ not only because we select different objects out of the same world but because we see different worlds." [12]

> Because morality is depending on vision, Murdoch argues that the work of learning to see the world properly constitutes the most urgent task in moral formation. Murdoch follows Simone Weil in arguing that an authentic perception of reality is possible to the extent that self-absorption and the imperial tendencies of the "fat, relentless ego" are diminished.[13] The most exigent means of engaging in the "long deep process of unselfing"[14] is the cultivation of the faculty of attention, because attention teaches a person how things can be looked at and encountered without exploitation. In this regard, there exists a direct correlation between the diminishment of the self and the capacity to perceive reality: "moral changes come from an *attention* to the world whose natural result is a decrease in egoism through an increased sense of reality."[15]

In Christian language, the concept of "kenosis" provides direction to understanding what this diminishment of the self looks like. For nature writers like Mary Oliver, paying attention is a form of prayer which results from self-abandonment. The ego is decentered to make room for an authentic relation with the other. The other is appreciated not for what it can provide to the one paying attention but for the sake of its essence. That is what is being contemplated.[16] This is affirmed within ecopsychology

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[12] Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature, ed.* Peter Conrad (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 82, quoted in Matthew T. Eggemeier, "Ecology and Vision: Contemplation as Environmental Practice." *Worldviews* 18, no. 1 (2014): 54–76. *http://www.jstor.org/stable/43809504,* 57.

[13] Iris Murdoch, *Sovereignty of the Good* (New York: Routledge, 1970), 50.

[14] Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 54, quoted in Matthew T. Eggemeier, "Ecology and Vision" *Worldviews* 18, no. 1 (2014): 54–76. *http://www.jstor.org/stable/43809504,* 57.

[15] Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics,* 57.

[16] Han, Byung-Chul, *Vita contemplativa* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024), 40.

which argues that there is a growing movement to shift the paradigm of a bounded, isolated self toward a vision of a self that is permeable, interconnected not only with other human selves but with all living beings and process . . . Such a theory . . . take[s] into consideration that the infant is born into not only a social but an ecological context. It must acknowledge that, from the earliest moments of life, the infant has an awareness not only of human touch, but of the touch of the breeze on her skin, variations in light and colour, temperature, texture and sound.[17]

Deep contemplation, which involves decentering the ego, makes space for an appreciation of the sacred. Through the decentering of our egos, we let go of our fears and cultivate a form of seeing that perceives the presence of the sacred, of God/Holy Mystery in the world, in the city. When we let go of our fears, we become open to the sacred opportunities of chance encounters. A man panhandling on the street offers me a blessing and a big smile in response to my meager offer of loose change. I have a conversation with a slightly inebriated man about how much you would need to make to afford a Jaguar and whether you could do that by working at McDonald's. We both agree that neither of us will ever be able to afford such a vehicle, but we can appreciate the beauty of the car anyways. We say goodbye as though we are neighbours meeting on the street, which, in fact, we are.

Deep contemplation also makes us more open to interconnected nature of a gift-giving culture. We stop on our walk by tiny Quadra Park on Belleville Street to relax in the shade on what will be one of Victoria's hottest days this summer. As we sit on a bench in a glade of trees, a young man wearing a backpack enters the glade. He is carrying a piece of garbage in his hand, a food wrapper, I think. As he makes his way to the garbage can near us, he looks at the top edge of the open garbage can. After he deposits his wrapper in the garbage, I notice that he picks up a half-smoked cigarette off the lip of the garbage can. Someone has left a gift for him. He gives it a quick look and then pockets it before making his way down the street.

We are eating brunch with our youngest at one of our favourite Victoria brunch restaurants, Blue Fox. We each order a big breakfast. Our youngest is not able to finish her meal and, as is her custom, asks the server for a take-out box. Packing the remains of the meal into the box, she also

[17] Anita Barrows, "The Ecopsychology of Child Development," in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth/Healing the Mind,* ed. Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes and Allen D. Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books,1995), 103.

asks for a pen. She writes the date, time, name of the restaurant and contents of the box on the top surface. Once we exit, she heads to a garbage can and, like the giver of the cigarette, sets the box down carefully on its lip. She, too, knows someone will be by that bin soon and will appreciate her small gift of the remains of an *eggs benny*.

These stories are tiny steps toward an eco-theology of my neighbourhood. Quoting Wendell Berry, "The question that must be addressed is not how to care for the planet, but how to care for each of the planet's millions of human and natural neighbourhoods, each of its millions of small pieces and parcels of land." [18] Only attachment to specific places, places we know with the intimacy of love, will enable us to imagine new ways of being in relationship with all.

[18] Ched Myers, "Watershed Discipleship: Re-Imagining Ecological Theology and Practice," Geez Magazine, 11 April 2016, *https://geezmagazine.org/magazine/article/watershed-discipleship-re-imagining-ecological-theology-and-practice*.

CLIMATE HOLOCAUST, MORTAL PLANET, AND ESCHATON
by Harold Wells

Could it be that human beings will bring about the "end of the world"—whether through nuclear war or climate catastrophe—and so frustrate the Creator's intention for the world? If Christ were to "come again," would there be an earth, or a humanity, for him to return to? Or, does God's promise of a good *eschaton,* implicit in Jesus' resurrection, guarantee that no such catastrophe can ever occur? If we are to clarify our Christian eschatological hope for the consummation of God's Reign, these questions must be put into the wider context of what contemporary science can tell us about the probable future of our planet, and indeed of the whole physical universe.

Christians dare to believe, in spite of so much horror, tragedy and sorrow, that we live in a world rich in beauty, love and meaning, the creation of a purposeful Creator. Because of the Christ event, we believe that the Creator has an end-time goal, an *eschaton* for the world, in which God's Reign finally will overcome all evil and death. Hope in the consummation of God's Reign usually comes to the fore in times of great evil and suffering. Theology after the world wars was intensely aware that the world as we know it does not correspond to the goodness of God. The unspeakable carnage of World War I, and the holocaust events of World War II—especially the concentration camps and the nuclear bombing—landed a mighty blow to the modernist faith in progress through reason, science and education. Optimistic utopias, built upon the modern myth of inevitable progress, no longer reassure us of a brighter human future.[1] Today, if we listen to contemporary climate science, hope for salvation through the technological mastery of nature has also been turned on its head. We must now formulate Christian hope in view of yet another possible holocaust.

Climate Holocaust?

Multiple crises face humanity in our new century: a burgeoning population, now exceeding seven billion and projected to reach nine billion by mid-century; fierce competition for scarce energy resources in an increasingly industrialized world, the widespread depletion of fresh water aquifers, drastic soil erosion, water and food shortages, the danger of

[1] Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope against Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), chapters 1-3.

armed conflict over the necessities of life. And closely related to all of these—climate change.[2]

Large segments of the world population do not believe that climate change is real, or that human beings are causing it. An organized media campaign, largely funded by the coal and oil industries, has succeeded in convincing many people that global warming is a matter of controversy, confusing the public with "balanced" reporting, as though there are two legitimate sides to the question.[3] But the scientific consensus is almost universal.[4] Andrew Weaver, Professor of Earth and Ocean Sciences at the University of Victoria and participant in the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), tells us that between 1965 and 2007, 30,219 peer reviewed articles were published on climate science, commenting: "you can bet that if there were an Achilles heel to the theory of global warming, it would have been discovered long ago."[5] The IPCC reports,[6] of which Weaver is a lead author, are the basis for the international conferences (Kyoto, Copenhagen, Durban) at which national leaders have attempted to negotiate, so far unsuccessfully, an effective plan to limit global warming.

The fourth assessment report of the IPCC was the work of 152 lead authors and more than 600 experts from 113 countries. Panel members assess peer-reviewed science on climate change. In the last major report they asserted that evidence is "unequivocal" that the earth is warming at a dangerous rate.[7] They also asserted that this is mainly caused by emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2) from the burning of fossil fuels—coal, oil and natural gas—which create a blanket over the earth's atmosphere, trapping heat which would otherwise exit into outer space. This is confirmed by many publications of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and dozens of books by qualified researchers.[8] Weaver informs us that, even if we ceased burning fossil fuels today, it would take centuries for the CO_2 to dissipate.[9] Observations of present conditions and computer models

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[2] Lester R. Brown, *World on the Edge* (New York: W. W. Morton, 2011).

[3] James Hoggan, *Climate Cover-Up* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2009).

[4] Naomi Oreskes, "Beyond the Ivory Tower: The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change," *Science,* 306:5702 (2004).

[5] Andrew Weaver, *Keeping our Cool (*Toronto: Penguin, 2008), 85.

[6] See the Fourth Report of IPCC at *http://www.ipcc/reports.*

[7] Ibid.

[8] References to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences by Kristin Shrader-Frechette, *What Will Work?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[9] Weaver, 86. See also Tim Flannery, *Here on Earth* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2010), 196.

projecting climate trends, as well as paleo-climate records found in layers of ice and deep-sea sediment cores, reveal the power of CO_2 (produced in the past by natural processes over very long periods of time) to generate climate change. The unprecedented rapidity of climate change through the burning of fossil fuels is exacerbated by the destruction of forests, which absorb carbon, and by agriculture, especially the raising of animals and their methane emissions. Global average temperatures of the whole surface of the earth, including the oceans, have already increased by 0.8 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels.[10]

The melting of Arctic ice accelerated dramatically in 2007, beyond the expectations of the most pessimistic climate scientists.[11] The Arctic is the most important refrigerator keeping the planet cool, reflecting light and heat back into space (the "albedo effect"). An amplifying feedback of heat occurs when white ice and snow are reduced and more heat is absorbed into both sea and land. A further feedback occurs with the melting of Arctic tundra, which includes huge deposits of methane, also a potent greenhouse gas.[12] Vast deposits of methane ice are found also on the floor of the ocean, which, with the warming of the seas, could bubble forth and greatly accelerate the greenhouse effect.[13]

Increased CO_2 is particularly disturbing in that it contributes to the acidification of the global ocean, which covers 70% of earth's surface. NASA astrophysicist James Hansen informs us that, when CO_2 increases in the air, the ocean absorbs more carbon dioxide and becomes more acidic. Warming and acidification are now killing coral reefs, resulting also in a huge decline of fishing stocks and marine bio-diversity.[14] Most alarming is the recent evidence of the diminishing of ocean plankton, so essential for the production of earth's oxygen supply![15] Potential tipping points for runaway climate change, which would be "out of our hands" and lead to a "point of no return" are: 1) the collapse of the Greenland and West Antarctica ice sheets, melting now at a rate of 100 cubic kilometers per year, contributing greatly to sea-level rise; 2) an increase of carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere (that has grown from 270 parts per million {ppm} in the pre-industrial era, to 387 ppm in 2009, and rising) to 450 ppm; a

[10] James Hansen, *Storms of my Grandchildren* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), 70-72.
[11] Weaver, 279.
[12] Discussion of tundra by Weaver, 130-131; Hansen, 149.
[13] Hansen, 149; Alanna Mitchell, *Sea Sick* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2009), 96-97.
[14] Hansen, 165-166; Flannery, 158.
[15] Mitchell, 25-26.

concentration above 450 ppm would likely increase average global temperature by about 2 degrees C, with disastrous consequences; 3) massive feedback discharges of frozen methane deposits from the seas and tundra.

Hansen argues that, to avoid such a tipping point, the goal should not be 450, but 350 ppm, and that temperature rise, having now increased by 0.8 C above pre-industrial levels, should be kept to a global average of 1 degree C.[16] "Global warming of an average 2 degrees C. or more would make earth as warm as it had been in the Pliocene era, three million years ago. Pliocene warmth caused sea levels to be about twenty-five metres (eighty feet) higher than they are today."[17]Given the continuing growth of population and industrialization, the low level of public awareness and the reluctance of governments to act, there is little probability that warming will be limited to 1 degree C.

While they agree about the basics, scientists can differ about details, having differing assessments of timing and consequences. Scientist-philosopher Kristin Shrader-Frechette, in her powerfully argued new book, *What Will Work,* makes dramatically clear what can be expected within this century: "If global-average-temperature increases reach 2 - 2.4 degrees Celsius, the IPCC, the 2009 National Academy of Sciences, and the classic UK-government analysis, the Stern Report, argue that 1 in 6 people will be without water, tens-to-hundreds of millions of people will be climate refugees, made homeless by droughts, storms, flooding and sea rise. Part or all of the Amazonian rain forest—the lungs of the planet—will collapse. Billions of people will suffer water shortages by 2080 . . . " She goes on to speak of failing crop yields, especially in developing countries, great increases in hunger and starvation, the disappearance of small mountain glaciers and resulting water shortages in many places, sea level rise affecting London, Shanghai, New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and many other low lying places. Some scientists speak of disasters as late as 2080; others point to various degrees of deterioration by 2020 and 2050,[18] and to calamities already occurring, in unbearable summer temperatures, increased numbers and intensity of hurricanes, floods, tornadoes and forest fires. Weaver writes in a similar vein of the consequences of "unacceptable" global average warming of 2 degrees C. above pre-industrial levels.[19]

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[16] Hansen, 276, 140-142; 165.
[17] Ibid., 13.
[18] Flannery, 249, 260.
[19] Ibid., 11; Weaver, 203, 258.

It is especially troubling to realize that by far most of the greenhouse gases have been generated by the industrially developed "First World" nations of the West. But it is the poorer peoples of the Global South, who have contributed little to this problem, who will suffer first, and suffer most.

Do such prospects constitute a "holocaust?" They would make World War II look like a walk in the park. Are we really looking at a possible end of human history? Weaver, who is not noted for extreme statements about climate change, speaks of "the destruction of civilization as we know it."[20] The distinguished British geo-physicist James Lovelock warns of a "new dark age later in this century," with humanity reduced perhaps to 10% of its present numbers, confined to the polar regions and certain islands in the ocean.[21] Hansen, while not disagreeing with these scenarios, points to the ultimate disaster: "the Venus Syndrome." Originally an expert on Venus, he speaks of a planet which is now 97% carbon dioxide, but which once was graced by oceans, where a runaway greenhouse effect occurred, with the ocean boiling and evaporating into the atmosphere. Schrader-Frechette argues persuasively that this could still be turned around with a concerted effort to conserve energy, and rapid development of renewable energy.[22] But Hansen concludes that if we continue with business as usual, burning all the remaining coal, oil and gas, including what is extracted from tar sands and tar shale, the Venus Syndrome is a "dead certainty."[23]

We have known for a long time that we are capable of bringing human history to a violent end through nuclear holocaust, and of taking most or all other living creatures with us. Though the fear of nuclear war and nuclear winter has receded in recent years, that eventuality remains possible. Military historian Gwynne Dyer warns that, in the harsh circumstances of drastic climate change, human conflict over territory and resources will be intensified, and that nuclear conflict will be more likely than ever. The two annihilating possibilities may well coincide.[24]

This, then, is the threatening context within which we are challenged to think again about Christian eschatology.

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[20] Weaver, 255.

[21] James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia* (London: James Allen, 2006), 11; *The Vanishing Face of Gaia* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 79.

[22] Shrader-Frechette, chapters 6 & 7.

[23] Hansen, 236.

[24] See Gwynne Dyer, *Climate Wars* (Toronto: Random House, 2009).

"Christianity Is Eschatology"

It is difficult to conceive of a coherent good news (gospel) message that omits the promise of a good destiny for God's creation. Thinkers as diverse as Albert Schweitzer, Johannes Weiss, Karl Barth, and Jürgen Moltmann have maintained, in their different ways, that eschatological hope is definitive for biblical faith. Moltmann, who lived through World War II action and was incarcerated in a prisoner of war camp, knew the guilt and despair of a defeated and shamed post-holocaust Germany. It was out of that experience that he recognized the centrality of biblical hope:

> From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope . . . The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ.[25]

The prophetic hope of the Hebrew Scriptures is always hope for this world, for a reign of peace and justice, of health and plenty (Isaiah 11:3-9, 35:1-7, Micah 4:3-4). It is hope not only for human beings, but also for the natural world in which we are embedded. Isaiah prophesied, "The wilderness will become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field will be deemed a forest" (Isaiah 32:15). Even when, in later centuries, Jewish belief in life beyond death appeared, it was hope not merely for the human soul, but for bodily resurrection (Daniel 12:2-3). Jesus is proclaimed "Messiah" (an eschatological title), fulfilling the hope of the prophets, only because his resurrection signalled that the Reign of God has broken decisively into the world of oppression and death. As the vindication of a righteous martyr, and as a victory over injustice and death, Jesus' resurrection is seen in the New Testament as the inauguration of God's Reign, which is "already and not yet." Or, to put it differently, the risen Christ is the *prolepsis,* or preview, of God's consummated Kingdom. The church's mission of good news, of justice and peace, is founded upon hope in the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

We shall have to return to biblical eschatology, but first, what can we know from contemporary science about the long term future of the earth and the universe?

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[25] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope,* trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1965), 16.

Mortal Planet, Finite Universe

Events expected billions of years from now may seem irrelevant compared to the prospect of the imminent, tragic disasters that threaten us. But questions about the ultimate future of the physical world are relevant to any Christian eschatology. Is the world progressing, through an evolutionary *creatio continua,* toward a glorious "Omega point" (as Teillhard de Chardin believed)? Or will this wonderful creation, fertile from the beginning with such beauty, order, and meaning, come to nothing in a final futility?

We might consider first the probable future of our planet from the perspective of physical science. William Stoeger, a theoretical scientist specializing in astrophysics, asserts the vulnerability of earth to catastrophic events capable of destroying life on earth. He points out that craters on the earth, and mass extinctions evident from fossil records, indicate the frequent arrival of celestial objects, large and small. As recently as 1908 an asteroid of 30-60 metres in diameter actually did crash into Siberia and destroyed everything within 2,150 sq. kilometres. Had it hit a large city, the city would have been totally destroyed. In another category altogether, astronomers know that in 1994 a huge comet hit the giant planet Jupiter, leaving scars larger than the whole planet Earth. Some 65 million years ago a giant asteroid did hit the earth itself, bringing about drastic climate change and "the great extinction," including the famous end of the dinosaurs. Volcanoes can also be life- threatening to the planet. Further back, about 250 million years ago, an even greater climate change and mass extinction occurred, not as the result of an extra-terrestrial object but of volcanic eruptions and the oxidation of carbon.[26] Stoeger points out that, almost certainly, such events will occur again.

Even if life on earth is not destroyed by such calamities, we must recognize that all earthly life, and the planet itself, are mortal. Since the character of the earth depends entirely on its relationship to the sun, what, according to astrophysicists, will eventually happen to our sun? From what is known about the physics of stars, we know that the sun, now in existence for about 5 billion years, will remain about the same for 5 billion more, burning hydrogen at its core. Thereafter, with the hydrogen diminished, the sun is expected to expand and cool and to become a "red giant," that will envelop the earth and other planets with fire. "We know

[26] William R. Stoeger, S.J.. "Scientific Accounts of Ultimate Catastrophes in our Life-Bearing Universe," in *The End of the World and the Ends of God,* eds. John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 22-24.

that other suns have followed this evolutionary path," says Stoeger, and eventually, "it will do the same, putting an end to our earth as we know it."[27]

Earth is a miniscule part of this unimaginably immense universe, and just one of millions of planets, some of which may well nourish life. But the universe as a whole is not eternal, and exhibits no possibility of evolving into a Kingdom of God. This conclusion is based on the second law of thermodynamics, according to which the universe, having begun in a "Big Bang," is subject to the law of entropy and will eventually run down into disorder. Astrophysicists have proposed two equally bleak scenarios: the universe heating up and imploding upon itself, or expanding infinitely, with gradual heat loss. The prospect is either "freeze or fry."[28] John Polkinghorne, theologian and former professor of mathematical physics at Cambridge, tells us that "it is scientifically as sure as it can be, that the cosmos will end either in the dying whimper of decay, or in the big bang of collapse into the melting pot of the big crunch."[29]

For the atheist, the final futility of the universe, dissolving ultimately into nothingness, is obvious. For many of us, however, who cherish intimations of God through beauty and love, order and meaning, atheism is unconvincing. Certainly, if we take the biblical message at all seriously, it is impossible to think that God's good creation will come to nothing. Polkinghorne states clearly what is at stake: "If the universe is a creation, it must make sense everlastingly, and so ultimately it must be redeemed from transience and decay."[30]

The mortality of the earth and the finitude of the universe imply, theologically, that the created universe is not a fit object of worship. Pantheism (all things are divine) is not an option for Christian faith, since the *kosmos* itself, and we ourselves within it, are subject to violence, decay and death. Nor can we regard the universe as the incarnation, or "the body of God," as some have suggested,[31] for the creation as such does not "save"

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[27] Ibid., 24-25.

[28] Robert John Russell, "Bodily Resurrection, Eschatology, and Scientific Cosmology: The Mutual Interaction of Christian Theology and Science," in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments,* eds. Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 5-6.

[29] John Polkinghorne, "Eschatological Credibility: Emergent and Teleological Processes," in Peters et al., 47.

[30] John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 148.

[31] Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

us, and cannot show us a gracious God, nor a good destiny for creation.[32]

As for human selves, if they are to be part of this redemption, they must include the continuity of persistent identities beyond death, yet also sufficient discontinuity to ensure freedom from the suffering, sin and mortality of the old creation. We see such continuity and discontinuity in the transformed physicality of the risen Jesus, which is our glimpse into our own future eternal life: "Christ being raised from the dead will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over him," says Paul (Rom. 6:9); "for this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:54). Since, as embodied beings, we are integrally part of the earth, our existence is entwined with that of all other creatures. Thus we cannot speak of a new creation for human beings without the new creation of the earth.[33] From all we know today about the mortality of the earth and the finitude of the universe, it is evident that ultimate hope for creation, for us and for all creatures, rests in the eternal God alone.

But what about biblical eschatology itself? Can a rational person today possibly believe in something so fantastic? Has it any credibility at all to contemporary ears?

Biblical Images of *Eschaton*

Biblical depictions of an end-time or *eschaton* are indeed difficult for people educated in a modern scientific world view. Often couched in a pre-modern cosmology, replete with bizarre apocalyptic symbols and codes, they cannot be understood literally as descriptions of what will happen at the end of history. Rather they must be seen as poetic images, works of the human imagination, stammering to describe the indescribable. Just as the infinity and eternity of God cannot be grasped fully by our finite minds; just as the original act of God's creation cannot be envisaged adequately; so also an eschatological event of new creation cannot be described literally. An event that ends history cannot be an event like others in time and space, since it is "an event that happens to all time and space and transforms them into eternity."[34]

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[32] Harold Wells, "The Flesh of God: Christological Implications for an Ecological Vision of the World," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 15/1 (1999), 51-68.

[33] Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End—the Beginning,* trans. M. Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 151.

[34] Bauckham and Hart, 118.

That images of *eschaton* cannot be understood as literal descriptions is evident in that they differ one from another, though they sometimes combine or overlap. For example, we hear of a great battle with a "lawless one" who finally will be defeated by the coming again of Christ (2 Thess. 2:3-8). This *parousia* (coming, appearing) of Jesus Christ will be marked by the sound of a trumpet, the descent of Jesus from heaven and the resurrection of the dead; those still living will be "caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The Book of Revelation also imagines a great battle and the coming Christ as warrior and judge, who will destroy the forces of evil, represented as two great beasts (Rev. 13). We read of "a new heaven and a new earth," and of "the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:1-2).

In the synoptic gospels, the central image is that of Jesus, the Son of Man, "coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." This appearing is accompanied by a total disruption of the universe as we know it: "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of heaven will be shaken" (Mark 24:29-30). These images, while poetic and imaginative, are not merely "imaginary." They arise out of the prophetic hope for a transformed world, and out of trust in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. What is imagined is a total transformation of this finite, transient world into a "new creation," in which God will take up the whole creation to share in God's own eternal life. It would happen not only "synchronically" (all at the same time) to the whole world, but also diachronically (cutting across all ages) to the whole temporal course of creation's history.[35] This hope of a new creation can neither be contradicted nor affirmed by science, as though it were a possibility inherent in the universe as we know it. The eschatological hope rests rather upon faith in an eternal One, who will come to a world which is "groaning in labour pains," to deliver it from its "bondage to decay" (Rom. 8: 21-22). In that event, as Paul proclaims, God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

Eschatology and Human Agency

An eschatological hope that finally depends on God alone raises questions about the significance of human agency. Is there anything for us to do? The early Paul evidently expected an apocalyptic event in his own lifetime, and believed that "the present form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:31). If so, why bother about what happens in this world? Paul had to warn the

[35] Ibid., 131.

Thessalonians, apparently idle due to their expectation of Christ's imminent return, to continue to work and earn their living (2 Thess. 3:6-13). Apocalyptic preachers in our own time tend to adopt an ideology that virulently rejects the government regulation of "free enterprise" that seems necessary if climate catastrophe is to be avoided. An American preacher, the late Jerry Falwell, declared that "our grandchildren will laugh at those who predicted global warming. We'll be in global cooling by then, if the Lord hasn't returned . . . The whole thing is created to destroy America's free enterprise system and our economic stability."[36]

How, then, do we avoid complacency? What can motivate Christians to struggle, indeed to be at the forefront of ecological movements to combat climate change? Theologically, ecological commitment can be rooted in reverence for God's good creation,[37] or simply in love for this planet and love for humanity. It can also be based on the Incarnation, since the Word of God became flesh in the human Jesus, implying the eternal significance of the material creation.[38] From an eschatological perspective the key concepts are the Reign of God, new creation, and eternal life.

The paradox of God's Reign is that it lies ahead, and yet has already come in the messianic life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is assured, then, by God's grace alone. At the same time, Jesus' disciples are called to serve the growth of that Reign in the here and now. The Kingdom of God grows, "like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches" (Luke 13:18-19). The disciples do not merely wait, but are sent out to preach the Kingdom and heal the sick (Luke 9:2). Parables of Jesus speak of a kingdom growing through human efforts (Matt. 25:13-40; Luke 19:11-27). Christians are called, then, to grow or "build" the Kingdom, and our work in the Lord is "not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Paul speaks similarly of the "new creation" which he awaits; yet "anyone who is in Christ is [already] a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). It is typical of John to speak in the same way of "eternal life," a quality of existence which begins in the present age. "Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me [already] has eternal life," and already has "passed from

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[36] Quoted by Bill McKibben, *Earth* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 12.
[37] Ross L. Smillie, *Practicing Reverence* (Kelowna, B.C: Copperhouse, 2011).
[38] Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 58-60.

death to life" (John 5:24). Thus the Kingdom is now, the new creation is now, and eternal life is now. The life of discipleship is not merely waiting, but active service, here and now, of the Kingdom of life, in confrontation with the kingdom of death.

American theologian Kathryn Tanner is particularly eloquent as she laments "a nihilistic sense of the futility of efforts to improve the human situation and conditions of the planet."[39] Eternal life, she insists, is not just otherworldly, in the sense of life after death, or spiritualized in a merely personal attitude. "Instead, eternal life exists now in competition with another potentially all-embracing structure of existence marked by futility and hopelessness . . . Eternal life infiltrates, then, the present world of suffering and oppression, understood as a new pattern or structure of relationships marked by life-giving vitality and renewed purpose."[40] Complacency, she insists, is ruled out by "a transcendent present—by the present life in God." Tanner alludes to possible climate catastrophe when she speaks of the need to draw upon the work of the physical and social sciences, for "action has an urgency; moreover, every moment counts. As scientists describe it, the world does not have an indefinite extension into the future; nor will a second chance for action come again by way of a future reinstatement of the world now suffering loss."[41]

To return to our opening question: Could a human-caused annihilation frustrate the Creator's intention for the earth? Biblical authors frequently depict God lamenting, even weeping, over human sin and folly, and unspeakably evil things happened to God's people, in conquest, exile and crucifixion. In view also of the twentieth century holocausts, we cannot presume that a supernatural *deux ex machina* will save us from either nuclear or climate catastrophes. We cannot rule out the possibility that human foolishness will result in annihilation, or in a dark age, centuries or millennia in duration. Thus, Christian faith must not be used as a basis for ecological or political complacency. We are called to a vigorous ecological ethic and political action in the service of God's good earth.

Assuredly, however, a final event of resurrection and redemption, cutting across all times and ages, could not be cancelled out by human foolishness, or even by natural calamities. The death of one planet could

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[39] Kathryn Tanner, "Eschatology without a Future?" in Polkinghorne and Welker, 226.

[40] Ibid., 230-231.

[41] Ibid., 235.

no more overwhelm the redemptive purpose of the sovereign God than the death of one individual. The decisive events of incarnation and resurrection remain the ground of our unquenchable faith and hope.

Editor's Note: Harold Wells has written the following reflection on where we are with the climate crisis, twelve years after this article was published. Here are his thoughts.

Twelve Years Later

It's mid-summer 2024, and the beautiful town of Jasper has been devoured by a Great Beast. Ferocious wildfires rage in California; floods and mudslides afflict British Columbia. China has endured twenty major floods this year; hurricanes and tornadoes seem to be everywhere. Deadly heat, often over 100 degrees F., is spreading over much of the U.S and afflicts Italy, India and other equatorial regions.

The up-to-date facts about climate differ alarmingly from those mentioned in the article above. As explained there, warming results from CO2 emissions (plus methane and other greenhouse gases) as measured by parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere. For thousands of years of civilization, ppm stood at about 270 ppm, growing gradually with industrialization after 1850 or so, but rising dramatically in recent decades. Climate scientists have long warned that 450 ppm would be accompanied by a dangerous increase of about 2 degrees C in global average temperature. In July 2024, ppm reached 425![42] In the whole year 2023 the corresponding global average temperature increase was 1.48C above pre-industrial levels.[43] In July 2024, that figure reached 1.5C.[44] We recall that the 196 nations at the Paris climate conference of 2015 passed a "legally binding" agreement to keep global average temperature increase below 2 degrees C, but with efforts to stay below 1.5C.[45] Beyond these levels of heating, a calamitous and irreversible tipping point will likely be reached with further increases in heat, hurricanes, sea level, wildfires, famine, and vast migration.

Climate catastrophe has arrived but has not yet amounted to a global "holocaust". While public awareness has grown and few people now

[42] *www.copernicus/eu/2023*; NOAA (USA): *www.earthco2/2024.*
[43] *www/copernicus/eu/2023.*
[44] 3NOAA: *www.earthco2/2024.*
[45] *www.ipcc/paris/2015.*

deny its reality, few are aware of its urgency. Fossil fuels continue to be subsidized, and emissions continue to grow.

There are signs of hope and possibility. Notable progress has been achieved in the development of "green" renewable energy. Growth of solar energy and innovative applications are becoming widespread. Because of the falling cost of wind and solar, investment globally in new renewable infrastructure for energy production now exceeds investment in new fossil fuel development.[46] Remarkably, new renewable energy increased by 50% in 2023![47] Nevertheless, with growing population and industrialization, the world remains over 80% dependent on coal, oil and natural gas, and their carbon emissions are still growing.

Many climate scientists have concluded that we have waited too long, that little probability now exists, politically, for a reduction of emissions sufficient to avoid further catastrophe. They argue: artificial "geo-engineering"—perhaps solar radiation management (SRM) – will become necessary in the decades ahead. Others vigorously oppose further attempts to "master" the natural world, pointing out the great danger of side effects of SRM, and the insufficiency of international regulation to control it.[48]

Speaking theologically: Can we be both hopeful and clear-eyed? Let us avoid facile optimism. No one expects the Almighty to blow away the greenhouse gases, or suddenly refreeze the melting glaciers. The Creator does not overrule the order of the universe to accommodate human folly. But the Eternal One whom we meet in Christ is the God of life and not of death. We can believe that the Creator Spirit is at work through the marvelous healing processes of nature, striving among us to sustain the good creation as it has flourished on planet Earth. The Spirit invites us to live in active hope, as servants of the Kingdom of Life, and God's providential love for the world.

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[46] Bruce Usher, *Renewable Energy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019) 21*; www.irena.org/renewable-energy/2024.*

[47] *www.iea.org/news/2024.*

[48] Gwynne Dyer, *Intervention Earth: Life-Saving Ideas from the World's Climate Engineers* (Toronto: Random House Canada) 2024, 61; the conservationist organization Mongabay on solar aerosol injection: *www.mongabay/2024*; many recent papers by climate researchers in Greta Thunberg, *The Climate Book* (New York: Penguin Press, 2022).

WATER AND WOMEN: AN ECOFEMINIST THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE

by Seoyoung Kim

Introduction

This paper analyzes the challenges surrounding water through an ecofeminist theological lens and promotes solidarity within Christian communities. Issues related to water scarcity and contamination are apparent in both global and local contexts. Recently, unpredictable disasters have increased in frequency and severity, often exacerbated by climate change. The recent Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge underscores the critical importance of water and the necessity for reflection. As Christians, how should we approach the current water crisis? While technological advancements can mitigate these problems in a material sense, theological reflections offer significant guidance in understanding the deeper issues, identifying what topics require reflection, and determining appropriate actions. It is also crucial to recognize that the burden of water-related issues disproportionately affects women, particularly in vulnerable communities. A variety of arguments about the causes might be proposed, but this paper focuses on ecofeminist analyses, which affirm the need for a critical understanding of human- and male-centered social structures, as well as the theological frameworks that have frequently been used to explore and justify these. Therefore, I suggest that a non-hierarchical and non-patriarchal approach is imperative when developing theological responses to these challenges.

Water and its crisis for living beings

Water is generally perceived as the source of life and an essential resource for all living organisms. However, it tends to be commodified and treated merely as a tool for human survival. A significant incident last year highlighting the critical issue of water pollution was the start of Fukushima radioactive water discharge into the ocean. On August 24, 2023, the Japanese government began releasing diluted treated radioactive water into the sea, deeming it more economical than continuous storage.[1] However, the long-term dangerous effects of this action remain uncertain. Additionally, scientific evidence indicates that water contaminated with

[1] Kelly Ng, "Fukushima nuclear disaster: Japan to release treated water in 48 hours," *BBC News*, 22 August 2023*, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-66578158*.

tritium impairs the reproductive ability of fish.[2] Despite these concerns, the Japanese government proceeded, claiming that dilution made the water safe, and as a result, Fukushima's contaminated water continues to flow into the Pacific Ocean.

Marine biologist Rachel Carson criticized the disposal of radioactive waste into the ocean, expressing concerns about the accumulation and distribution of radioactivity in marine life. She stated, "To dispose first and investigate later is an invitation to disaster, for once radioactive elements have been deposited at sea they are irretrievable. The mistakes that are made now are made for all time."[3] The sea, the cradle of life, is threatened by human activities that disrupt marine ecosystems and endanger countless species. The discharge of Fukushima's radioactive water exemplifies the treatment of seawater as a dumping ground. Humans, despite being just one of many species on Earth, act as if they are the center of the planet. Exploiting and polluting the sea for economic gain reveals an underlying perception of human supremacy, viewing the sea as a mere object to be used.

While the pollution of seawater is alarming, the mismanagement of freshwater poses an equally critical threat. Freshwater is essential for sustaining life and meeting the basic needs of all living beings. Pope Francis highlights the fact that water should be distributed to all beings equally, so that poverty due to water scarcity may be reduced in this era of environmental degradation.[4] However, water has primarily been treated as a commodity, leading to its overuse. Environmental activist Vandana Shiva argues that the overuse of water, "which works *against*, and not *with*, the logic of the river," is a form of violence.[5] This violence against nature not only affects humanity but also impacts the entire earth's ecosystem, as seen in the ongoing water crisis. The misuse of freshwater reflects the exploitative tendencies seen in the treatment of seawater, highlighting a pervasive disregard for nature. Furthermore, women, the poor, and

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[2] Kevin Bundy, Bertrand Thériault, Rachel Lane, Julie Burtt, and Patsy Thompson, "Tritium, Health Effects and Dosimetry," in *Encyclopedia of Sustainability Science and Technology*, ed. R.A. Meyers (NY: Springer, 2012), 11044.

[3] Rachel L. Carson, *The Sea Around Us* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1951), xiii.

[4] Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis on care for our common home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), no. 28-30.

[5] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1988), 186.

indigenous people suffer disproportionately from this violence since both clean water *per se* and water specifically for drinking are affected by the intersectionality of gender and class. Privileged people can access water easily compared to marginalized communities. Therefore, the water crisis is not only an environmental issue but also a social one, deeply intertwined with questions of power and life.

Water and Women

All living beings have been influenced by the water crisis, yet women and girls are the most affected because of their close relationship with water in daily life.[6] According to a UNICEF-WHO report, 1.8 billion people worldwide rely on fetching water for drinking, with 70% of them depending on water collected by women and girls.[7] This means that women tend to experience significant burdens related to water. The issue for water and women can be categorized into three large areas: health, safety and security. A lot of women in developing nations suffer from the lack of freshwater and a poor sanitation infrastructure. The equitable access to water is associated with food safety. It is easy to be infected by water-borne diseases due to lack of sanitation facilities and poor hygiene. The lack of safe drinking water and water for sanitation affects mostly women.[8] One of their primary tasks is to carry water for their families. They are not able to attend public school education due to the priority of their domestic work for their daily living. In addition, those who procure water and seek areas for sanitation are more likely to experience sexual assault since women go to well-known public places on a regular basis and are in danger of being attacked by sexual predators. In short, the water crisis is linked to the plight of women, amplifying their vulnerabilities in multiple dimensions.

The question of power and life in relationship to the contemporary water crisis points to its deeper causes. The vulnerability of nature and women is caused by inequalities of gendered social roles and poverty, paving the way for water-related suffering of women. The water crisis is

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[6] Jennifer Tisdel Schorsch, "Small Loans for Safe Water: Unleashing Women's Power," *IMPAKTER*, 19 March 2019, *https://impakter.com/small-loans-for-safe-water-unleashing-womens-power/*.

[7] UNICEF and WHO, *Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000-2022: special focus on gender* (NY: United Nations Children's Fund and World Health Organization, 2023), VII.

[8] Georgia L Kayser, Namratha Rao, Rupa Jose, and Anita Raj, "Water, sanitation and hygiene: measuring gender equality and empowerment," *Bull World Health Organ* 97, no. 6 (2019): 438.

further exacerbated by capitalist-driven development models that treat natural resources as mere commodities. Hence, the argument by Shiva, that water scarcity is man-made, makes sense. She states, "most villages are facing new water scarcities created by maldevelopment and a reductionist science."[9] Although the limitation of her statement is that it focuses on Indian contexts in the 20th century, it portrays the developed and developing world in unequal terms, which adds a Continental dimension to the problem. Merchant compares the different responses of women from both developed and developing nations: "First World women combat these assaults by altering consumption habits, recycling wastes, and protesting production and disposal methods, while Third World women act to protect traditional ways of life and reverse ecological damage from multinational corporations and the extractive industries."[10] Although there is a question whether or not it is really possible to reduce or even do away with the dividing line between developed and developing nations, these factors indicate that regardless of nations the relationship between water and women has been addressed in a valuable way.

Consequently, thinking about water is a way of thinking about life abundance for all living beings. Bearing water in mind allows us to make progress in bringing about justice and peace on earth. This is because water is not only a human right but also a path towards gender equality, sustainable development, and poverty alleviation.[11] For achieving the just and equal reorganizing of societal relationships, Meghadeepa Chakraborty, an Indian social scientist, affirms the empowerment of women: "the engagement of women in the process of the conservation of environment has not only ensured them the platform to voice their issues and concerns, identification and prioritization of needs but has also overcome both overt

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[9] Shiva, 179.

[10] Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World,* 2nd ed. (NY: Routledge, 2005), 194.

[11] According to article 25 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, "1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. 2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection." In the relationship with water, human rights are fulfilled by distributing water in a just manner to all. United Nations General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (NY: United Nations General Assembly, 1948), article 25.

and hidden power struggles."[12] The empowerment of women becomes an important factor in the field of Christian theology as well. Ecofeminist theologians, who are concerned about the degradation of nature and women, contribute to the retrieval of the hidden voices of vulnerable living beings and to the reconstruction of a traditional Christian theology which has been shaped by human- and male-centered approaches. I have been very influenced by their perspectives; that is why I argue for the necessity of the perspective in this paper. Recognizing the value of water (nature) and women (all living beings), is a challenge to Christian theology.

An Ecofeminist Theological Response

Ecofeminist Theology emerged in the late 1970s when Francoise D'Eaubonne critiqued patriarchal systems and argued for egalitarian relationships between genders.[13] It points out that biblical texts and Christian theologies had adopted a view that both women and nature are subjected to men, revealing hierarchical dualisms as problematic for both. American theologian Anna Case-Winters highlights issues such as the gender power gap, the feminization of poverty, and the subjugation of women, arguing that "self" must be reinterpreted in relation to the earth community.[14] In my previous article I deconstructed the dichotomies of spiritual/physical water, male/female, and human/nature within the story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus in John 4, emphasizing that the physical water the Samaritan woman offered Jesus and the spiritual living water Jesus provided to her are intertwined and interconnected.[15] Ecofeminist theology advocates egalitarian relationships, recognizing all beings are part of the earth community (God's creation) and reinterpreting key theological concepts such as anthropology, creation, and sin.

Ecofeminist theology makes three major contributions to theological discourse. First, it leads us to value a contextual methodology rooted in experience. It emphasizes the diversity of practical contexts, focusing on this world and the specific environments where living beings

[12] Meghadeepa Chakraborty, "An Eco-feminist Water Revival Project in Gujarat," *ANTYAJAA: Indian Journal of Women and Social Change* 3, no. 1 (2018): 78.

[13] cf. Françoise d' Eaubonne, *La féminisme ou la mort* (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1974), 113-24.

[14] Anna Case-Winters, *Reconstructing a Christian Theology of Nature: Down to Earth* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 65-68, 75.

[15] cf. Seoyoung Kim, "The story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus (John 4:1-41) focusing on water within an ecofeminist theological perspective," *Practical Theology* 15, no. 5 (2022): 467-78.

reside. Ecofeminist theology considers the unique background and history of each being, addressing various aspects such as religious, cultural, ecological, and political-economic insights. For example, Hart Winter, who situates her proposal for water justice both in the Christian tradition and in ecofeminist theory, introduces a contextual story from the Marshall Islands which she visited and where she saw and heard about women's hardships and sacrifices due to the lack of freshwater.[16] She compares this context with her region of Chicago in the USA in which water is regarded as a commodity and is overused: "the commodification of water has changed the shape of water, constricting its fluidity to conform to market structures."[17] On the other hand, Gebara, a Latin-American theologian, describes a range of experiences of the poor in her region of Brazil.[18] She is concerned with the poor who are the victims of garbage dumps: "The rich throw their garbage in the spaces used by the poor: Cities often open garbage dumps right where the poor build their homes. In areas in which there is no drinking water, in which air pollution is most dense, and in which health problems abound, the poor jostle one another for a few square feet on which to live."[19] While Hart Winter mainly critiques consumerism, Gebara focuses on an interconnection between a variety of issues such as poverty, water crises and related systemic ill health by highlighting that garbage disposal is not a simple issue. However, both Hart Winter and Gebara look at social injustice in contexts and reject escapism (a way of denying contexts) and domination (a way of exploiting the vulnerable living beings and this earth). This emphasizes the fact that contextual reflection is necessary to overcome and transform current issues. The most important meaning of the emphasis on experience and its context in Christian theology is to free Christians from the extreme after-life faith and to know how to live as a Christian on earth during the water crisis era.

Second, ecofeminist theology encourages reflection on the anthropocentric, patriarchal, and structural violence related to water crises occurring in our society and individual lives. For instance, the discharge of radioactive wastewater from Fukushima into the ocean must be seen as treating the sea as a dumping ground. The exploitation and pollution of the

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[16] Rachel Noelle Hart Winter, "Just Water: A Feminist Catholic Response to the Commodification of Water" (PhD diss., Loyola University, 2014), 156, *http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/897*.

[17] Ibid., 164.

[18] Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 68.

[19] Ibid., 3.

ocean for economic gain reveal an implicit perception that humans are the agents, while the sea is the object, a tool to be utilized. In addition, the control of water reflects hierarchical and dualistic thinking, where humanity assumes dominance over natural processes, such as damming rivers, which disrupts ecosystems and displaces communities. An ecofeminist framework addresses these issues by highlighting a key common recognition: both women and water have been treated as objects and materials by men and "humanity" within social frameworks. Sallie McFague, a well-known ecofeminist theologian, critiques a consumerist/militarist paradigm which focuses on privileged human beings and the neo-classical economic model, claiming that human beings have benefits which allow them to control all other beings.[20] For her, sin is the refusal to share and work for a just and sustainable planet.[21] McFague argues in favor of an ecological-economic model, which is based on a communitarian view of humanity that is characterized by ecological (living together) and economic (sharing resources) concerns.[22] Similarly, Hyun Kyung Chung, another ecofeminist theologian, argues that sin is a deviation from a right relationship with God, manifested in greed, ignorance, and apathy that destroy creation and others.[23] Repentance, for her, involves recognizing these sins and restoring that relationship through justice and love. Like McFague and Chung, ecofeminist theologians rearticulate what sin is in relation to the ecological crisis and seek repentance that leads to peace and reconciliation on earth.

Third, ecofeminist theology advocates for the cultivation of "sensitivity" to the suffering experienced by ecological crises. The sensitivity here refers to an empathetic awareness of the interconnectedness of all things. From an ecofeminist theological perspective, there is a call to recognize and express the suffering of water, women, nature, and numerous ecosystems. Ecosystems are intricately intertwined, meaning that the pollution of the ocean with radioactive wastewater does not solely contaminate the sea but endangers all life forms

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[20] Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 87.

[21] Ibid., 38.

[22] Ibid., 32.

[23] Hyun Kyung Chung, "Seven Weeks for Water 2015, week 7: 'Theological Reflection on Water from a Salimist (Korean Eco-feminist) Perspective', by Prof. Chung Hyun Kyung," *World Council of Churches*, 07 March 2015, *https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/seven-weeks-for-water-2015-week-7-theological-reflection-on-water-from-a-salimist-korean-eco-feminist-perspective-by-prof-chung-hyun-kyung.*

on Earth. The potential consequences for the planet are alarming and difficult to fully comprehend. However, instead of leading to despair, this water crisis can be seen as an alarm, prompting humanity to recover its sensitivity. Feminist theologian Rachel Muers asserts that the groaning of the Earth serves a prophetic role, inviting us to repentance and a new way of communal living.[24] The hope is that the water crisis might become a catalyst for Christians to actively cultivate their sensitivity.

The notion that everything is interconnected leads to a cosmic Christology, where Christ can be encountered through the universe. If we consider that the Spirit of God dwells in the cosmos and nature, and extend this idea to water, it follows that God's Spirit can be found through water, through the sea—in other words, that God can be encountered through these elements. Some scholars, who have studied the intersection of Christian faith and scientific discovery, have developed hydro-theology, an area of study that explores the presence of God's Spirit through water.[25] These scholars have endeavored to demonstrate this, based on the belief that the divine Spirit is revealed through water. However, there is a risk of falling into pantheism, where water is identified directly with the Spirit of God. This could lead to the erroneous belief that God's Spirit can be fully explained through mathematics, science, language, or phenomena. Therefore, it is crucial to seek ways to cultivate sensitivity without inclining toward pantheism.

Ecofeminist theologians sometimes emphasize the close relationship between nature and women to advocate for the restoration of sensitivity. Expressions such as "the great mother of life, the sea", "sea is a mother's womb" highlight the femininity associated with nature and connect this femininity to the restoration of sensitivity. Evoking the image of a nurturing mother has a positive effect, encouraging a greater appreciation for nature and life. However, I do not equate ecofeminist theology with the romanticization of nature or the idea that women are inherently closer to nature than men. Instead, I value approaches that advocate listening to the voices of the vulnerable and interpret the suffering of the Earth within the interconnected relationships of God, humanity, and nature as ways to restore sensitivity. I encourage Christians to seek contextually appropriate ways to restore sensitivity in their own lives. For example, Chung mentions the Salim movements from South Korea

[24] Rachel Muers, "The Holy Spirit, the voices of nature and environmental prophecy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67, no. 3 (2014): 337.

[25] Colin A. Russell, "Hydrotheology: towards a natural theology for water," *Science & Christian Belief* 19, no. 2 (2007): 161.

towards water justice, which "calls us to bring out the women's survival wisdom, the life-giving femininity in both men and women, and the long-forgotten Divine feminine within us, between us and around us."[26] Movements such as this engage with principles like liberty, equality, and sustainability, emphasizing the interrelated existence of nature (water) and all living beings. We are called to find our own path toward water justice, ultimately supporting ecofeminists' hopes and vision—the building of egalitarian societies that recognize not only "the full humanity of each human person" but also the "intimate partnership with nonhuman communities" on this earth.[27]

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined an ecofeminist theological response to water and women, highlighting the characteristics of ecofeminist theology, which calls for a non-dualistic and non-discriminatory approach within Christian theology. Ecofeminist theology urges us to recognize the intrinsic value of nature as part of God's creation, fostering a deeper respect for all living beings. By exploring the connection between nature and women, we gain crucial insights into the suffering women endure due to the water crisis, which, in turn, calls for strengthened solidarity within the Christian community. Believers are encouraged to take collective action that embodies the values of non-hierarchy and non-patriarchy. An ecofeminist reflection on the water crisis extends beyond environmental concerns, offering a profound opportunity to examine the social and structural violence embedded in our lives. It reminds us of the interconnectedness of all living beings in a vast network where each influences the others.

As individual efforts converge into a powerful movement, our hope must be that by restoring our sensitivity and standing in solidarity, the life-giving streams of water will flow widely across the earth, nurturing all forms of life. Embracing these principles enables the Christian community to address the water crisis in a manner that upholds the dignity and rights of all creation, particularly the most vulnerable. Through this collective effort, ecofeminist theology envisions a world where gender equality, social justice, and the integrity of creation are fully realized.

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[26] Chung, first paragraph.

[27] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecofeminist Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics: A Comparative View," in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, eds. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (NY: Fordham University Press, 2007), 80.

Moreover, the rapid development of digital technologies since the Covid-19 pandemic has made it easier to connect with other local movements globally, creating opportunities for digital solidarity. For this to become a reality, Christians must develop robust forms of collaboration on our shared pilgrimage toward peace and justice.

ECOLOGICAL DEVASTATION, THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION, AND THE FAITH AND ORDER TEXT, *CULTIVATE AND CARE*

by Kristine A. Culp

Hundreds of billions of tons. How do we even imagine the volume by which the polar ice caps are melting each year? Even more, how do we conceive of the mammoth but largely invisible power of the carbon economy to heat oceans into a rising, stinking, global stew? Science explains how habitats are altered, marine life destroyed, local fishing economies upended. Studies tell of the demise of economic and cultural livelihood, and how such loss often drives global migration and other drastic responses needed for survival, especially when political and economic policies exacerbate rather than ameliorate the situation.[1] Yet even if one is well-versed in the science, it can be difficult to trace the invisible connections, to comprehend and dwell within these boggling scenarios, and to recognise dangerous larger-than-life forces. "Climate change is often described as a 'wicked problem,'" the writer Amitav Ghosh observes. "One of its wickedest aspects is that it may require us to abandon some of our most treasured ideas about political virtue." What is at stake is a matter far beyond disputes about science's prognostications and political courses of action. "What we need instead," Ghosh argues, "is to find a way out of the individualizing imaginary in which we are trapped."[2]

A recent ecumenical text from the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches (WCC), *Cultivate and Care: An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for and Within Creation*, addresses the interconnected global crises of climate devastation and economic injustice.[3] Taking a cue from Amitav Ghosh's call for alternative

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[1] See, for example, the 2017 case study of Philippines fisherfolk by Michelle Gan and Margaret Von Rotz, "Development for Whom? How Navotas Fisherfolk Resist the Displacement of Their People and Livelihood," *https://iboninternational.org/wp-content/uploads/attachments/Navotas%20Case%20Story_Final1.pdf.*

[2] Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 135. Further citations will be given in parentheses.

[3] This essay draws from Kristine A. Culp, "An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for and within Creation: A Commentary on the Faith and Order Text *Cultivate and Care*," *The Ecumenical Review* 77:2 (April 2022): 251-67; previously published in French translation in *Istina* 66:3 (2021): 265-82. I am grateful for the invitation of Paul Miller and the encouragement of Sandra

imaginaries and his recognition of the vital resources of religious myth and traditions, this essay considers the ecumenical text as offering a moral, theological, and ecumenical imaginary in the face of climate change and its grossly unequal devastations.

Patterns of occlusion and evasion

Ghosh, an award-winning novelist and essayist, is perhaps best known for novels such as *The Glass Palace* and The Ibis Trilogy: *Sea of Poppies, River of Smoke,* and *Flood of Fire* that address colonialism and explore the histories of economic and social relations, particularly among the people of India and South Asia. He knows well that the power of the novel is entwined with its ability to create worlds that allow for narratives of exploration and discovery. However, there are limits to the possible worlds and narratives that can be thought within the scope of modern literature and art. In his 2016 book, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, he argues that the imaginaries of modern Western novels and art, which typically address historical and political matters through lens of personal agency, identity, authenticity, and self-awareness, may in fact render climate change "unthinkable."

Ghosh's argument is fascinating—both engaging and alarming. As one commentator says, "He asks very powerfully whether the current generation is deranged by our inability to grasp the scale, violence, and urgency of climate change."[4] According to Ghosh, even the most sophisticated narrative and aesthetic strategies may inadvertently participate in a "great derangement" that hinders the recognition of uncanny potentialities and banishes the improbable from depictions of reality. The resulting imaginary is susceptible to inadvertent collusion with bureaucracy, colonialism, and the carbon economy, and it can blunt wisdom about deep human proclivities and dangerous vitalities that may have been available to ancestors through local knowledges and religious myth. He argues that, despite the vaunted self-awareness of the times, in fact, culture and politics are rendered oblivious to the "dangerously alive" powers that surround our lives. They are hindered in their ability to address

Beardsall to build on this commentary.

[4] Imraan Valodia as quoted in *The Conversation*, "Climate change has deep historical roots – Amitav Ghosh explores how capitalism and colonialism fit in," 30 August 2024, *https://theconversation.com/climate-change-has-deep-historical-roots-amitav-ghosh-explores-how-capitalism-and-colonialism-fit-in-237586.*

the wicked problem of climate change and to mobilise the global governance that is needed.

Ghosh's argument should interest ecumenists, theologians, and people of conscience for many reasons, but especially: 1) his contention that "the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination" (9), and, 2) his commendation of Pope Francis's 2015 Encyclical *Laudato Sí* as offering "a way out of the individualizing imaginary in which we are trapped."[5]

Ghosh compares *Laudato Sí* with the text of the Paris Agreement from the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21). He finds the former "remarkable" for its "lucidity," "directness of style," and "the sober clarity with which it addresses complex questions" (153), while the latter's "giddy virtuosity" and technical jargon are deployed as instruments of "occlusion" and intentional "opacity" (155f.). In contrast to implicit disavowals in the Paris Agreement, *Laudato Sí* already assumes that the places and creatures of the earth are undeniably amid a complexly interconnected economic and climate disaster. The encyclical is not blinkered by the politics of nation-states or "economistic" ways of thinking. It sets aside what Ghosh terms as "treasured ideas about political virtue," that is, neither merely performing politics nor practising it as a forum for self-expression (see 131). Ghosh understands that sober clarity must also be accompanied by mass mobilization and intergenerational commitment; he sees that religious motivation and organizations can have important roles alongside popular movements (160).

Cultivate and Care

The Faith and Order text, *Cultivate and Care: An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for and Within Creation*, takes its place alongside *Laudato Sí* and other urgent calls by religious leaders and communities to address ecological devastation and how its effects intensify hardship and suffering in unequal and unjust ways.[6] I engage the ecumenical text to consider

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[5] Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Sí of The Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home*, 24 May 2015, *http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.*

[6] *Cultivate and Care: An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for and within Creation*, Faith and Order Paper No. 226 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2020), *https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/cultivate-and-care*. In full disclosure, I contributed to this text as Faith and Order commissioner, working under convenors Sandra Beardsall and Jaeshik Shin, and alongside Yolanda Pantou and subgroup members, and indebted to Faith and Order

how public theology in a time of climate devastation, in particular, a collectively articulated ecumenical theology, might address the limits and possibilities of the deep, often tacit, governing imaginaries of our day. The connections with Ghosh's arguments and *Laudato Sí* should be salient even if they remain tacit due to space constraints.

The title comes from a translation of the imperative in Genesis 2:15: the earth and universe are pictured as an integral and interdependent whole, as the *creation* of the Lord God, who charges the human "to cultivate and care" for God's creation. In the Genesis accounts and elsewhere in the Bible, creation is depicted as a living reality, vital but suffering, on which and with which all human activity is dependent and interrelated. This depiction shifts from a theological model in which creation was at best treated as a context for human action, to one in which creation—as a threatened living reality and as an historically underdeveloped locus of ecumenical theological reflection—offers a crucial context, challenge, and resource for the articulation of the churches' faith and life. Creation comes to the fore as a living reality in which God is ever-present and as crucial for interpreting and orienting faith in God. Humans are situated in this creation not as its sovereign but as creatures, as a part and as participants who are responsible for the well-being of the whole creation. "We must not forget that human beings are also creatures, interconnected with the rest of creation and with the earth itself" (§11, also §9).

It is the first such statement to be offered by the WCC's Faith and Order Commission. As such, it draws on global perspectives from Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, Pentecostal, and other Christian traditions. It was published in 2020, five years after *Laudato Sí*, and written with appreciation for the encyclical's contributions. It considers what the churches might say together about ecological devastation and the concomitant suffering of the earth and its most vulnerable inhabitants in light of shared faith in God as creator, redeemer, and sustainer.

Moderator Susan Durber and Faith and Order Director Odair Pedroso Mateus.

Compare also the sustained leadership by Patriarch Bartholomew Constantinople, known as the "Green Patriarch." See *http://spiritualecology.org/contributor/his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew*. Among other Christian leaders and communions, see the many relevant programmes and initiatives of the World Council of Churches at *https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change*. Note also interfaith, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and other declarations of concern about climate change.

At its outset, *Cultivate and Care* affirms, "Christian communities may not in conscience ignore this crisis and the pathos of a threatened creation" (§1). These terms—the "conscience" of communities and the "pathos of a threatened creation"—already signal the text's moral, theological, and ecumenical work. These three aspects contribute to the further work of attuning and enriching a shared imaginary for a time of global crisis. First, there is its moral vision of uniting *justice for creation* with *justice within creation*. The opening section, "Urgent Environmental Concerns," §§3-13, lays out this challenge. Second is its *theological* imaginary. The central section, "Theological Perspectives," provides an overview of "Creation as a Theological Theme in the World Council of Churches," §§14-17, which is to say the emergence of its consideration after an earlier lack of attention, and elaborates "Relevant Theological Perspectives," §§18-27, in which the doctrine of creation comes into prominence in interconnection with other theological loci. Finally, the text's imaginary is *ecumenical*, if perhaps not in the way that Faith and Order texts have typically focused on church-dividing issues. *Cultivate and Care* vivifies the meaning of "the unity of the church within creation" (§1), and the final sections, §§28-38, call for "Ecumenical Response Contributing to Visible Unity."

A moral imaginary

The opening section, §§3-13, situates the imperative to "cultivate and care" in the urgency of this moment and in an interdependent global context. "The present climate devastation affects everyone, and it affects the most vulnerable among us first and most of all. Those who already had the least benefits [of God's resources] are now often forced to bear the largest share of the catastrophic consequences of climate transition while continuing to suffer basic-needs scarcity" (§6). Arising from the pathos of creation and the suffering of the poor and most vulnerable is "a call for the transformation of mind, will, and lifestyle" (§7). This is a spiritual and theological matter that goes to the root of human yearning, to the dignity and goodness of all creation and creatures, and to faith in God as creator, redeemer, and sanctifier. "[T]he human struggle for fulfilment often becomes a determination to win" in which "it is the weakest and poorest among us who will sacrifice or even be sacrificed for the comfort of others" (§5). Transformation requires the confession of human sinfulness, repentance, mourning, and willingness to sacrifice. It demands the acknowledgement that "all parts of God's creation, every person and every creature, have an intrinsic value which should be appreciated, respected, and protected" (§12; also §19). Dignity and value inhere in the earth and

its vulnerable creatures as beloved parts of God's creation rather than in their value to others.

To hold together justice for and within creation is a daunting matter of distributive and substantive justice and then some. In this text, justice is depicted as mutually accountable and generative reciprocity, more robust than notions of equal rights, access, or distribution of goods. Justice is made recognizable more than it is delineated or legislated. The registers of the text are biblical, symbolical, relational, and reorienting rather than definitional or primarily analytical. The contrasting terms to "justice for and within creation" are suffering, devastation, abuse, degradation, and, concomitantly, diagnoses of human greed, heedlessness, exploitation, the "desire to win," unwillingness to "sacrifice one's own comfort," sinfulness. To be sure, the text's attention to "the entanglement of ecology, economy, and cultural identity" depends upon tangible measurements of justice and equity such as the "unfair distribution of resources," conflicting goods, "unequal distribution of benefits," "an unacceptable standard of living," and basic needs. But these crucial measurements are placed within a relational and eschatological horizon that is theological as well as moral and that carries emotional, volitional, noetic, ascetic, and even aesthetic dimensions. The discussion of justice for and within creation is closely connected to the affirmation of the intrinsic value of creation and creatures, which is tied to faith in God as creator, redeemer, and sustainer who assures that power and goodness converge in an arc of history that stretches from creation to consummation. This faith undergirds self-sacrificial action that is urgent for transformation and hope that fosters it.

A theological imaginary

The text's orienting theological symbol is creation, but not apart from redemption and reconciliation or from the movement of a creating, redeeming, and sustaining God with all of God's creation, including human creatures and the church. The doctrine of creation is interpreted in relation to theological anthropology, sin, evil, salvation, reconciliation, an incarnate and cosmic Christ, church and sacraments, sanctification, pneumatology, and eschatology. Readers are led through a kind of liturgical movement, from confession and repentance to reflection and proclamation, followed by formation and engagement, and concluding by uniting in prayer before the God of life. Creation is not "merely" the setting or background for a fuller revelation of God in Jesus Christ, rather, creation is "the first act of God's revelation" (§23).

As the text recounts, "The doctrine of creation was not always a central theological theme in the ecumenical movement. It was not considered a matter that divided the churches" (§14).[7] The theme of creation begins to emerge in the WCC in the 1960s, especially in relation to a cosmic Christ and the consummation of history as articulated at the 1961 WCC Assembly in New Delhi. The assembly theme, "Jesus Christ—the Light of the World," drew on Colossians 1:15-20, and reinterpreted creation and redemption in a cosmic key.[8] Subsequently, Faith and Order developed the study, "God in Nature and History." That study, completed in 1967, concluded: "To take seriously the final events in Christ, must also mean that he is confessed as the ultimate secret of creation. The key to the understanding of history must at the same time be the key to the understanding of creation, since both are essentially one."[9]

In 1983, the Vancouver assembly of the WCC called the churches to a common commitment to "justice, peace, and the integrity of creation." The third of these terms was added, giving new prominence to the theology of creation. More recent work on eco-justice has elaborated the relations among justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. "Eco" or "*oikos*" suggests connections between economy, ecology, and ecumenism and a more relational and trinitarian theology. "Theologically, this vision of *oikoumene* affirms creation as an organic, inter-dependent, coherent, and comprehensive whole, in contrast to dualistic, anthropocentric, androcentric, and hierarchical views of life" (§17).[10]

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[7] See also Lukas Vischer, "The Theme of Humanity and Creation in the Ecumenical Movement," in *Sustainable Growth: A Contradiction in Terms? Report of the Visser 't Hooft Memorial Consultation, The Ecumenical Institute, Chateau de Bossey, June 14-19, 1993* (Geneva: Visser 't Hooft Endowment Fund 1993), 69-88, *https://www.lukasvischer.unibe.ch/pdf/1993_humanity_creation_ecumenical_movement.pdf*. Parenthetically, for most of the twentieth century, theologians in the West considered "nature" to be human nature. One thinks, e.g., of Reinhold Niebuhr's Gifford Lectures, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols., published in 1941 and 1943.

[8] Paragraph 15 cites a key phrase from the assembly's keynote: "The way forward is from Christology expanded to its cosmic dimensions, made passionate by the pathos of this threatened earth, and made ethical by the love and wrath of God." Joseph Sittler, "Called to Unity," *Ecumenical Review* 14 (1962): 186.

[9] "God in Nature and History," in *New Directions in Faith and Order, Bristol 1967*, Faith and Order Paper No. 50, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1968), 12, as cited in *Cultivate and Care*, §15.

[10] The convergence text, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, FaithOrder

Cultivate and Care returns to the theme of a cosmic Christ in §§18-27, elaborating the movement of the Creator toward creation in Christ and anticipating an ultimate consummation. The section opens with the question, "What does it mean to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed amidst the crisis and pathos of a threatened creation?" and refers to Colossians 1:15 (§18). The drafters of *Cultivate and Care* were aware they were reprising these theological moves after a fifty-year hiatus. Citing Maximus the Confessor, the text grounds and limits this diversity in God who "contains, gathers, and limits them and in his providence binds both intelligible and sensible beings to himself and to one another."[11] God is interpreted as the cause and principle of the integrity of creation, which involves variety, interdependence, and, importantly, limitation, in relation to a larger whole. The next paragraph depicts human rejection of "God's design for creation" and destruction of "its original integrity."[12] "In our own time, the emergence of the environmental crisis demonstrates the alarming proportions of the damaging effect of sin upon creation" (§21). The text refers to many forms of destruction and damage evident in this crisis: of relationships and livelihoods, of abundance, variety, and beauty, of parts and wholes and their interdependence, and of limitations and constraints (§§5, 9-11, 30-32, 34).

In general, the language of "integrity" can connote "an organic, interdependent, coherent, and comprehensive whole," as in the vision of *oikoumene* cited above, and also the moral standing, coherence, or dignity of something. The text advances both senses. It promotes "an effective path toward greater unity not only of the churches, but also of the whole created cosmos" (§29; also §§7, 38). It attends to and affirms the intrinsic value of creation and all creatures. Value "derives from God" (§19), who is not an object in the world of values, but the source of value. Creation is a dynamic, interdependent whole; it is a living reality in which God is ever-present. "This design of God unfolds within the vast framework that runs from the creation of the universe to its consummation in the new heaven and the new earth" (§22). The material elements of the earth—water, oil,

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Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013) lifts up *koinonia* as a more dynamic, comprehensive, and relational notion than church unity.

[11] Maximus the Confessor, "The Church's Mystagogy," in *Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 186-87, and as cited in *Cultivate and Care*, §20.

[12] Genesis 3:17-19 is referenced, as is Romans 8:20-21, which has already been cited in §5; it informs the depiction that follows next: "Creation became subject to futility, groaning to be set free from its bondage to decay."

bread, wine—become means of communion with and thanksgiving to God (§24). "Christians, empowered by the Holy Spirit, are called to embrace their responsibility to care for creation (their common house, or *oikos*)" (§27).

An ecumenical imaginary

Finally, the text contributes to an *ecumenical* imaginary. Odair Pedroso Mateus, former Director of the Commission on Faith and Order, remarked that the three related texts, *Come and See*, *Cultivate and Care*, and *Love and Witness* ". . . raised the question of the ecumenicity of a Faith and Order text whose object is not a divisive issue that has either been inherited from the past or is experienced in the present," and also "whether Faith and Order work can be more synchronised with the ecumenical needs of common witness."[13] Each of the three texts venture "what the churches might say together theologically." *Cultivate and Care* considers what they might say together about climate devastation and the concomitant suffering of the most vulnerable, what they might say together about human action that precipitates and accelerates this crisis, and what they might say together about the faith in God the creator, redeemer, and sustainer that motivates and sustains Christian responsibility and engagement in this crisis. This is a method of asking together, seeing anew with others, affirming shared faith, and finding shared formulations.

Cultivate and Care addresses the question of church-dividing issues at its outset. "At first glance, the issue of environmental justice may not seem to be divisive for the churches, however, if we regard churches in their national and geographical contexts, dilemmas and divisive issues come to the fore" (§3). A robust understanding of "the unity of the church within creation" (§1) requires addressing the multiplying and seemingly intractable divisions of God's creatures into the more comfortable—and possibly more oblivious—and those who suffer and whose lives and livelihoods are precariously vulnerable. The divisiveness and divisions may be between nations, regions, and economic interests more than between churches, but the text makes clear that the line of suffering runs

[13] Odair Pedroso Mateus, "Faith and Order from Today into Tomorrow," in WCC Commission on Faith and Order, *Minutes of the Meeting in Nanjing, China, 13-19 June 2019*, Faith and Order Paper No. 227 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2019), 47.

through the churches, and that greed and xenophobia divide communities and people. The lines of division are not solely out there beyond the churches, they are surely within the churches just as they are within ourselves.

The closing section, "Ecumenical Response Contributing to Visible Unity," §§28-38, calls for response through an ecumenically and ecologically formed reorientation of community, life, worship, and witness. In a generous and astute response to *Cultivate and Care*, Aaron Hollander of the Graymoor Institute, highlighted an "ascetic dimension" to the text. "I applaud the document's handling of an issue that bedevils too much conversation—religious and otherwise—about ecological sustainability, namely, the concern that devoting too much attention to the environment will come at the expense of human flourishing." He observes that it is "human corruption" rather than flourishing that is at odds with ecology. "[T]he frameworks . . . that incentivize and reward economic exploitation/injustice are the very same as those that incentivize and reward the pleasures of the moment over the long-term good of the species and the planet." Arguing for the Christian ascetic heritage as "one of the great ecumenical repertoires," he contends that this heritage "has the means to 'talk back' to these demonic frameworks."[14] Perhaps talking back to "demonic frameworks" is related to "finding a way out of an individualizing imaginary."

Conclusion

This essay has focused on the moral, theological, and ecumenical imaginary that is acknowledged and fostered by one ecumenical text, Faith and Order's *Cultivate and Care*. Its treatment is inspired by Amitav Ghosh's contention that "the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination" (9); by his challenge to the limits of rationalistic, colonializing, bureaucratic, and economistic ways of thinking; and by his chastened hope that Pope Francis's *Laudato Sí*—and arguably also *Cultivate and Care*—may break out of "the individualizing imaginary in which we are trapped" (135) and be important for mobilizing people of conscience.

Although not discussed in this essay, there are many reasons to be less sanguine about the moral, theological, and collective power of religious symbols, texts, and practices. Most of us know those well. Yet if

[14] Aaron T. Hollander, unpublished response to *Cultivate and Care* for the WCC Webinar, "Common Witness on Environmental Justice and Religious Pluralism," 18 February 2021.

we begin by already acknowledging that we are in a disaster of monumental proportions, we must also confess our entanglement in mysteries and complexities beyond our own making and choosing, apprehend shared threats, devote ourselves to the dignity and value of fellow creatures and to the well-being of future generations, and humble ourselves before the marvels and power of a planet and universe that we neither own nor control.

Virginia Burrus, scholar of early Christianity, asks, "Is religion one way that humans engage the unsettling transience of material existence? its wondrousness and mystery? its unfathomable interconnectedness and vibrant intensities?"[15] Rephrasing Burrus's musings in the terms of this essay: Can religious myths, symbols, texts, and practices help sharpen communal consciousness and motivate global response to "the pathos of a threatened creation"? to distant melting polar caps and the invisible monstrosities of carbon heated seas? to ways that human creatures might take their place amid dangerous living threats and join their actions in the face of climate and economic devastations?

[15] Virginia Burrus, *Earthquakes and Gardens: Saint Hilarion's Cyprus* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2023), 153.

EGERTON RYERSON AND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS: A RECONSIDERATION

By Peter Wyatt

In the past decade the reputation of Egerton Ryerson has been dragged through the mud. He is accused of being "the architect of the residential school system." The evidence for this is a letter, or report, that he wrote in 1847, outlining a plan for the operation of "industrial boarding schools" to teach farming skills as well as academics to Indigenous youth. The schools would be a collaborative venture between the missionary churches and the government of Canada.[1] While this report seems enough for some to condemn Ryerson, this profile will offer a different and contextual perspective, situating Ryerson's apparently infamous report within the overall historical context and in relation to his personal history of engagement with Indigenous people. In such light, the report is far from being "a smoking gun," and is a testament to his high hope for Indigenous youth.

We Canadians have debts to pay to the First Nations. The discovery of unmarked graves at former Indian Residential Schools (IRS) is painful evidence of Canada's dismaying history with Indigenous peoples. Caught between rage and grief, some Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have sought to bring those responsible to account, even if posthumously. Egerton Ryerson, Methodist minister and visionary educator, has been bitterly arraigned.

At the university formerly named in his honour, a mob toppled his paint-smeared statue, and managed to break off its head, which now sits atop a pike on the Six Nations reserve south of Brantford. If Ryerson were the architect of the Indian Residential School system and its deplorable abuses, such actions might be defensible. However, I believe that he has been made a scapegoat for the sins of many.

[1] From 1841 to 1867, "Canada" was the name of the united colony of Canada West (formerly Upper Canada) and Canada East (formerly Lower Canada).

The Development of an Idea

The notion that Ryerson's report was the root cause of the IRS and its abuses could only arise by pulling it out of all context. There is, in fact, a long history of Native education in Canada and of the development of the concept and reality of the residential schools. Ryerson's contribution to them is one part of the larger story and far from its darkest chapter.

As reported in John Milloy's ground-breaking book, *A National Crime,* it was Upper Canada's Lt. Gov. Peregrine Maitland who first proposed the idea of Native residential schools to the British Colonial Office in 1820.[2] This counsel was ignored, largely because Imperial policy regarded Native peoples as incapable of learning European ways; there could be "no settled purpose of gradually reclaiming them from a state of barbarism and of introducing peaceful habits of a civilized life." But in 1830, Colonial Secretary Sir George Murray was to call for a "policy of civilization," a cooperative effort among Protestant missionary societies, the Department of Indian Affairs, and Indigenous nations that would result in a settled existence for Native people with houses, barns, churches and schools.[3]

This policy shift recognized a collaborative reality already taking place in Upper Canada, particularly as reflected in the mission strategy of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This mission included on-reserve schools that were welcomed and supported financially by the bands. When Sir John Colborne left his post as lieutenant-governor in 1836, he recognized the success of almost a dozen communities where progress in attaining "civilized arts" was underway.[4]

When Sir Charles Bagot became the next lieutenant-governor, he established a commission that met during the years 1842-44. The Bagot Commission recommended the continuation of existing on-reserve day schools and the development of new boarding institutions. These schools would teach animal husbandry, farming and mechanics to boys; girls would learn dairying, needlework, and cooking.[5]

As well as government bodies, First Nations leaders were calling for the development of boarding schools, generally known as manual labour schools. For instance, in 1844 Mississauga Chief Kahkewaquonaby

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[2] John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879-1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), 14f.

[3] Milloy, 11.

[4] Milloy, 12.

[5] Milloy, 13.

(Peter Jones) reported good news to his Methodist colleague and friend, Egerton Ryerson: "You will be glad to see that our Indian brethren have subscribed liberally, which shews their ardent desire to have Manual Labour Schools established amongst them. We forwarded a copy to the Governor-General, and His Excellency was pleased to approve of the liberality of the Indian tribes."[6]

In 1846 a general council of Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe) chiefs and leading men assembled at the Orillia Narrows to meet with Assistant Superintendent of Indian Affairs, George Vardon. The majority of those attending called for "manual labour schools." Such schools already existed in the United States, and in 1844 the first Canadian one, Alnwick, opened under Methodist leadership at Alderville, south of Rice Lake. About the same time, Chippewa, Moravian, and two Mississauga bands each agreed to contribute one-quarter of their Crown annuities to establishing a second school at Muncy, west of London on the Thames River. This became the Mt. Elgin School when its cornerstone was laid by Governor-General Lord Elgin in 1849.

As a result of the Ojibwe chiefs' request, Vardon wrote Ryerson, now chief superintendent of education for Canada West (formerly Upper Canada), asking for his advice on how best to fulfill the request. It was in response to Vardon that Ryerson wrote his 1847 letter.

The residential schools at Alderville and Muncy were to have mixed success in attracting and keeping students. So, the search for a best model went on. In 1860, responsibility for Indian Affairs was transferred from the Imperial Parliament to (the united colony of) Canada. After Confederation, the Canadian Parliament commissioned a report by Nicholas Davin; who called for Indian residential schools based on the model of the U.S. boarding schools which Davin and others had visited. It was Davin who produced a detailed strategy to re-socialize Indigenous children away from the influence of their parents and Native culture. Before this, the project of "civilizing" Indigenous children had faltered because "the influence of the wigwam was stronger than the influence of the school."[7]

John Milloy sees the Davin report as "the founding vision of residential school education." The shaping of the system that was instituted as a tool of assimilation occurred following Davin's report, in the period, 1879-1920. Though highlighting the role of Davin's report as the crucial

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[6] Egerton Ryerson, *The Story of My Life: Being Reminiscences of Sixty Years of Public Service in Canada*, ed. J. George Hodgins (Gutenberg e-book), 174.

[7] Milloy, 24.

beginning, Milloy says: "There is certainly no single root from which the Canadian residential school system can be seen to have grown."[8] The project of civilizing Native people through assimilation had the support not only of Indian Affairs officials and parliamentarians, but also of the Canadian public generally.[9] The historical evidence will not support pinning the weight of responsibility upon a single individual, whether it be Davin or Ryerson or anyone else. This was and is a shared responsibility, one broad enough to include us all. It is worth noting that Davin's report makes no mention of Ryerson or his letter.

It was only in 1883 that the Government of Canada began to implement an IRS system, under the leadership of Edgar Dewdney, Indian Commissioner for the West and a confidant of John A. Macdonald. It was as late as 1898 that Ryerson's letter of 1847, now styled a report, appeared publicly, as an appendix to an Indian Affairs statistical report. It was the only time it ever appeared as a public document.

Milloy's end date for the foundational period of the IRS is 1920, for it was in this year that the Indian Act was amended to make attendance compulsory where there was no on-reserve day school.[10] This date illustrates the fact that the regulations, conditions, and character of the residential schools varied over time and by location and denomination. In many respects, things worsened over time. Compulsory attendance and the prohibition of Indigenous tongues were relatively late features and never integral to the early vision of "manual labour schools."

The Character of a Minister and Educator

Egerton Ryerson was a Methodist minister and pioneering educator, the founder of Ontario's free and universal system of public education and the champion of teachers' colleges. Before he was thirty, he had become the most influential journalist of the day, serving as inaugural editor of *The Christian Guardian,* a weekly newspaper of the Canada Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Under his editorship its circulation became greater than all other thirteen Upper Canadian newspapers combined. On

[8] Milloy, 13

[9] Milloy, 23.

[10] Researcher Nina Green has collated information from annual reports of Indian Affairs showing that "in almost any given year that the residential schools were in operation, fewer than one-third of status Indian children were actually enrolled at a residential school." Most were enrolled in day schools or not in school. *The Dorchester Review*, July 13, 2022. *https://www.dorchesterreview.ca/blogs/news/two-thirds-did-not-attend.*

the controverted question of the clergy reserves—*the* political issue of the day—he was an outspoken champion of civil and religious liberty.

Ryerson was a confidant of governors-general and lieutenant-governors. Based on his understanding of, and loyalty to, British constitutionalism, he was an opponent of the radicalism that led to the 1837 Rebellion. The editor of Ryerson's diaries and letters called him a "singularly gifted man, whose name was intimately connected with every public question which was discussed, and every prominent event which took place, in Upper Canada from 1825 to 1875-78."[11] He was also a friend of his Indigenous fellow missionaries.

Ryerson grew up in his family's Church of England faith. However, at seventeen, under the influence of Methodist preaching, he experienced a life-altering vision of Christ, leading him to join the Methodist Church and to become one of its ministers. Of the impact of his mystical experience, he said, "I henceforth had new views, new feelings, new joys, and new strength."[12] This moment was pivotal for Ryerson and pivotal for understanding all that Ryerson was to say and do in public life. He was first and last a Christian and a Methodist minister. His quiet motto in public life was, "the cause of God, not private considerations."

Following three older brothers into the Methodist ministry, Ryerson became a probationer under the supervision of ordained colleagues, itinerating among the scattered settlements on the Niagara circuit. Then, admitted to the ministry on trial he was appointed to the York and Yonge Street Circuit, stretching from the Town of York to North and East Gwillimbury. Of this experience, he reflected:

> I preached from twenty-five to thirty-five sermons in four weeks, preaching generally three times on Sabbath and attending three class meetings, besides preaching and attending class meetings on weekdays. The roads were (if in any place they could be called roads) bad beyond description; could only be travelled on horse-back, and on foot; the labours hard, and the accommodations of the most primitive kind; but we were received as angels of God by the people, our ministrations being almost the only supply of religious instruction to them; and nothing they valued more than to have the preacher partake of their humble and best hospitality.[13]

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[11] Ryerson, *Story*, ix.
[12] *Story,* 25-26.
[13] *Story,* 47.

In his early years of ministry, Ryerson composed most of his sermons and controversial writings on horseback.

At age 23, Ryerson was assigned to serve as resident minister to the Mississauga band of the Ojibwe, or Anishinaabeg, who were already Christians. This band had settled at the mouth of the Credit River on a land grant of 4000 acres, part of their traditional hunting and fishing grounds. While they had been granted the land by the Crown, and while Lieutenant-Governor Peregrine Maitland had had twenty houses built for them, they had no title deed. When Ryerson arrived, he first stayed in a bark-clad hut with a domed roof called a wigwam and then had accommodation with the family of John Jones, where he slept, as they did, on boards. Writing to the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, he said this of his arrival at the Credit:

> I was at the time a perfect stranger to Indians and but little acquainted with their customs; but the affectionate manner in which they received me and the joy they appeared to feel on the occasion, removed all the strangeness of national feeling, and enabled me to embrace them as brethren and love them as mine own people.[14]

Through the pastoral year 1826-27, Ryerson was immersed in the life of the Mississauga. He led Sunday services, conducted prayer meetings almost daily, and learned enough Ojibwe to lead a class meeting—to cries of joy from his listeners that they were hearing the gospel in their own tongue.[15] He also used skills learned on the family farm (near Pt. Ryerse) to lead the construction of a building to serve as both a chapel and schoolhouse. Band members enthusiastically subscribed to raise money for the building. Ryerson said of his varied role, "I became head carpenter, head farmer, as well as missionary among these interesting people."[16]

In resistance to unchecked settler encroachment, Ryerson lobbied the colonial government to give the Mississauga exclusive right to their traditional salmon fishery on the Credit River. "I have this week been trying to procure for the Indians the exclusive right to the salmon fishery, which I trust will be granted by the Legislature."[17] It was never granted. In gratitude for this effort on their behalf, and in recognition of his boundless

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[14] Edgerton (sic) Ryerson, "Indian Mission at the Credit, Upper Canada," *Methodist Magazine,* Vol. X (1826), 313-315.
[15] *Story*, 70.
[16] *Story,* 63.
[17] *Story,* 66.

energy, the band honoured him with an Ojibwe name. Speaking in Ojibwe, the senior chief said, "Brother, as we are brothers, we will give you a name. My departed brother was named Cheehock; thou shalt be called Cheehock." "Bird on the Wing."[18]

Reporting to Lt-Gov. Peregrine Maitland, Ryerson said of progress at the Credit: "They have this season planted about forty acres of corn and potatoes, which promise an abundant harvest. About forty children attend the common school, nearly twenty can write intelligibly, and read the Holy Scriptures and the English Reader."[19] The scholastic opportunity afforded to, and the achievement of, the Anishinaabeg children is remarkable. It has been estimated that at the time of Ryerson's ministry at the Credit, only one in twenty Settler children had the opportunity to attend a school. Yet, at the Credit, every child had the chance.

At the Credit Ryerson developed a friendship with an interpreter, Peter Jones, earlier mentioned as Kahkewaquonaby or "Sacred Feathers." As a young man, Jones became a chief of the Mississauga and a missionary to his own people. In 1833 he became the first Indigenous person ordained by the Methodist Church. He was to travel three times to England to promote the cause of Indigenous education and to raise money for it. At the request of the Methodist leadership, he translated parts of Scripture and hymns into Ojibwe. The Methodist mission was deeply committed to bringing the gospel to the Ojibwe in their own language. It is noteworthy that church services of the Mississauga of the Credit continued in Ojibwe until 1871.[20]

Historian Donald Smith says that Ryerson and Jones were like blood brothers. They periodically travelled together in missionary endeavour, and Ryerson called him "my fellow labourer in the gospel and my beloved brother."[21] Jones called Ryerson "my friend in whom I have the greatest confidence."[22] Mutual respect and affection characterized their relationship. It was Ryerson who accompanied Eliza Field, Peter Jones'

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[18] Story, 66-67.

[19] *Story*, 62

[20] Reported to me in a telephone conversation by Darin Wybenga, Traditional Knowledge and Land Use Co-ordinator, Mississauga of the Credit First Nation, sometime in October 2023.

[21] *Story,* 83.

[22] Donald Smith, "Egerton Ryerson and the Mississauga, 1826-1856: An Appeal for Further Study," *Ontario History* 113 no. 2 (Fall 2021), 225, citing a letter written by Jones to his wife, Eliza.

fiancée, from her home in England to New York where they were married before coming home to the Credit.

When the post of superintendent of Indian Affairs in Canada West became vacant in 1854, Ryerson nominated Jones to become the first Indigenous superintendent, a nomination sadly ignored.[23] Once more, Ryerson's efforts to advance the cause of Indigenous people was blocked by tone-deaf government administrators. In 1856 Peter was gravely ill and then living near Brantford. He and Eliza stayed with the Ryerson family for a month in Toronto while he received medical treatment. Peter Jones died in April of 1856 and Egerton Ryerson delivered the eulogy.

The encouragement and ordination of Peter Jones is the outstanding example of the Methodist strategy to recruit and equip Native leaders to carry the mission to Native people. By 1830 there were seventeen Ojibwe or Mohawk ministers, exhorters, teachers, interpreters, translators and church workers. By 1840 there were nearly fifty. Among those ordained were: John Sunday, Henry Bird Steinhauer, Allan Salt, Moses Walker, Peter Jacobs, William Herkimer, William Beaver, and Abraham Sickles.[24] When I was serving in St. Paul, Alberta, in the early seventies, I met descendants of Henry Bird Steinhauer. On both the Goodfish Lake and Saddle Lake Reserves there were United Church communities of faith founded by Steinhauer.

Ryerson shared the view of almost all his compatriots that they were bringing a superior religion and culture to Native people. But at the Credit he was learning from experience with exemplary new friends:

> I was impressed to-day with the fact that the untutored Indian can display all the noble feelings of gratitude, love, and benevolence. An Indian, who has lately come to this place and embraced the Christian religion, has ever since shown great attachment to me. He has, without my knowledge, watered, fed, and taken care of my horse, saying he lived closer to the stable than I did . . . Oh, God, thought I, do such principles dwell in the people whom the white man despises?[25]

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[23] Donald Smith, *Sacred Feathers*: *The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) & the Mississauga Indians* (University of Toronto Press, 1987), 225-27.

[24] Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 160.

[25] *Story,* 71.

Indigenous writer Len Fortune asks an inescapable question:

> How is it possible for a virtuous man, as Egerton Ryerson was, to write the words, '**I feel an inexpressible joy in taking up my abode with them . . . my heart feels one with them,'** and then go on to execute a unconscionable plan to create a learning space, contaminated with a morally-deprived staff that would eventually abuse physically and sexually and steal the culture of its Indigenous students? *For a man of Ryerson's integrity and faith, it was not possible.*[26]

Content of the 1847 Report

When George Vardon asked for Ryerson's input into meeting the request of the Ojibwe chiefs in 1846, Vardon expressed his wariness about the project: "You are aware that there are numerous persons in the colony, though actuated by different motives, who will alike rejoice in the failure of a plan which tends to place the Indian on a footing of perfect equality with their White Brethren."[27] Clearly, both he and Ryerson saw the goal of establishing manual labour schools as equipping Indigenous youth to succeed, not to become a servant class. They were clearly aware, also, of the resistance that establishment of the schools would meet.

Ryerson's letter, or report, is only six pages long as published.[28] In it, Ryerson preferred to speak, not of "manual labour schools," but of "industrial schools." By this he meant that the schools should produce industrious students and workers. He saw the schools as providing "a plain English education adapted to the working farmer and mechanic." "In this, their object is identical with that of every good common school." Ryerson's sketch of the ideal residential school aimed at an equal education for Indigenous students.

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[26] Len Fortune, "Final Defence," an appeal to the President of Ryerson University, 5. Fortune, a Mi'kmaq, teaches at what is now Toronto Metropolitan University. I have not been able to find the source of his Ryerson quote, though it is in the spirit of much that Ryerson said about his feelings toward the Mississauga.

[27] Donald Smith, "Egerton Ryerson and the Mississauga, 1826 to 1856: an appeal for further study," *Ontario History* / Volume CXIII, No. 2 / Autumn 2021: 233.

[28] Appendix A, "Report of Dr. Ryerson on Industrial Schools," Public Archives of Canada.

To this end, Ryerson proposed an ambitious academic curriculum, including the study of geography, history, agricultural chemistry, drawing, vocal music and book-keeping, especially regarding farmers' accounting. He recommended that students in the schools should have their own money and learn book-keeping through the management of their own resources.

Ryerson's plan saw long working hours in summer: students would rise at 5 a.m. to begin the day, then learning/working in the field from 8-12 and 1-6. This may seem harsh, but it was the pattern that Ryerson lived as a boy and youth on the family farm. We who live today may have little idea how hard our pioneering forebears, adults and children alike, worked to survive.[29] While time for academics would not be great in summer, winter would offer much more time for learning in the classroom.

Likely the most surprising aspect for many present-day critics is the role he saw for churches and religion in the schools. "The animating and controlling spirit of each industrial school establishment should be . . . a religious one." However, by "religion" Ryerson did not mean the learning of doctrine or the inculcation of beliefs so much as the personal experience of divine, redeeming love, the very experience that characterized early Methodist conversions, including his own.

The churches-government partnership that Ryerson proposed would not have been a surprise to his contemporaries. Most forms of education at the time were premised on the important role of religion. In the project of equipping Indigenous youth to participate in the larger society ("civilizing" them), church and many political leaders (like Vardon) shared a common vision, and from the beginning of contact had worked cooperatively. The church-state institutional cooperation outlined by Ryerson was already a reality in existing day schools, both those for Natives and newcomers.

As well as proposing a controlling role for religion in the schools, something that he also advocated for public schools, Ryerson's report called for attention to the character and qualifications of those who would lead them. He thought it necessary "to employ at each of the establishments a superintendent who ought to be a spiritual pastor and father of the family; a farmer and a schoolmaster." Tall order indeed, but perfectly in line with his view of teacher training and excellence in school leadership.

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[29] For readers who've never read an account of the experience of our settler forebears, I recommend Susannah Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush.*

For Ryerson, the goal of the schools was both to educate and to produce successful farmers who would be owners of their own land or "overseers of some of the largest farms in Canada." He had an Irish example in mind, having seen schools in Ireland preparing Irish boys from poor families for better things. The basis of the economy of Upper Canada was agriculture and Indigenous youth needed to be equipped to participate in an agrarian economy. Moreover, with the great wave of settler immigration and the greatly diminished hunting and fishing habitat as forests were cut down, a former way of living would no longer be possible. Ryerson and other missionaries believed that, by taking agricultural possession of the land granted to them and settling down in villages, the Anishinaabeg could avoid being forced from it by covetous settlers.

Ryerson and his missionary colleagues lived from a vision of Indigenous-Settler relations that included dignity for both parties and assumed that Indigenous responses to the Settler culture, including school attendance for their children, would be voluntary, just as were their responses to the missionary message of Christian faith.

Given the multi-faceted development of the idea and reality of residential schools, the caring nature of Ryerson's relationship with Indigenous people, and the actual content of his letter to Vardon, reconsideration of the relationship of Ryerson to Indigenous people is needed.

Living Traditions – Half a Millenium of Re-Forming Christianity

Edited by Kimberlynn McNabb & Robert Fennel. Resource Publications, Wipf and Stock, 2019, pp. 144.

Anniversaries are important. They require us to pause for a moment and take stock of, and think about, the past. Such reflection can inform, and inspire, the future. The 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation is a milestone of note for anyone who is interested in the history and development of world affairs. The collection of essays in *Living Traditions* is an engaging and exciting meeting place of recollections of the past, and visions for the future.

In "Cherishing the Trees, as Christ is Lord Over All and the Center of All Things" Mark Hubert Lac paints a vivid picture of Martin Luther's, not just awareness of, but passion for, God's creation. He points out that "with industrial development came environmental impairment" (5). I can almost hear Martin Luther's voice coming from the paragraphs, admonishing human greed, selfishness, and losing the way.

Intentions notwithstanding, the Protestant movement of that time resulted in dividing the Church. For a variety of reasons, Christian unity remains elusive. "Unintentional Reformers, Larche, Christian Unity, and the Living Tradition of Footwashing" by Jason Reimer Greig invites a reflection on "a loss of vision of substantive moral community" (18). To counterbalance that notion, Jean Vanier and his L'Arche communities are used as examples of the belief that God's love effects a life changing practice. Foot washing is a metaphor for acts that build unity, that go beyond the divisions to become something to aspire to —a way of life.

"*Ecclesia semper reformanda*? Reforming the Church Before, During and After the Reformation" is an interesting take on the concept of changing and reforming the Church. Sean A. Otto suggests that "reforming the church goes back to the beginning of humankind, at least as it is portrayed in the Bible" (31). This article makes a compelling case that the Reformation did not just happen, that reformation is an expression of hope for change, and change into attitude of hope.

As if in a segue, in "Most Modern of Churches? Charles Taylor and the Baptist Inheritance of the Reformation," Jesse Smith invites a conversation on baptism which is at the heart of Christianity within a Protestant context. After reflecting on Charles Taylor's sobering thoughts in *Malaise of Modernity*, I am uplifted by such concepts as "unmediated

access to God" and "unmediated access to the Bible" (49) as they leave very little to the imagination as answers, or solutions.

When you walk the labyrinth, you often return to the center, to keep you grounded and focused. Kimberlynn McNabb's article, "Living Traditions, A Lutheran Perspective. *Semper Reformanda* of *Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Sola Gratia*" keeps us grounded and focused. She points out the centrality of Luther's Reformation, and that "Reformation is an ongoing practice" (58). Echoing the first article, she issues a reminder that "creation is not for sale" (57).

After being so grounded, I am taken into a world that might seem foreign to an average Protestant. "There's Something About Mary: How a New Protestant Mariology Can Benefit Ecumenical Dialogue" is Adrienne Findley-Jones' challenge to engage with beliefs surrounding Mary, which can be seen as a large bone of contention between various Christian traditions. Reading that "Church traditions do not invalidate scripture, but scripture can invalidate church traditions" (71), I am left believing that Mary can be more than a topic of conversation. I believe she can be a bridge between the divides.

It requires courage, curiosity and honesty to take an inventory of history, faith and hope. Andrew Oneill in "Tillich for Today's Church. The Critique and Gift of the Spiritual Presence" portrays Tillich as a messenger of hope. For that hope to become tangible, the church, as a community, must engage in "self-critique and self-transcendence" (84). Then the community might see what is, and what could be, and ongoing transformation may continue.

In "Luther, the Bible, and the Rule of Faith" by Robert Fennel, community continues to be the focal point as "Luther was deeply concerned for the health, vitality, and faithfulness of the church" (87). An engaging overview of several aspects of Luther's faith and theology contends that "Christocentrism guided Luther's exegesis in pragmatic ways" (95). This essay has the potential to challenge a return to simple, yet rich, roots of the Protestant tradition.

Jeffrey Hosick issues a reminder that lived experience must be at the heart of any identity. In "The Intimacy of Trauma: Musings of a Firefighter Chaplain on Trauma and the Theology of the Cross" he paints a vivid, and emotional, picture of the importance of being present for one another amid the indescribable. With Luther's theology of the cross as foundation, he observes that "trauma invites us to be messed up together" (106), and that "the place of trauma is also the place of grace" (106).

Where there is community there are conversations, and where there are conversations there is hope. Martin Rumscheidt's "If Only—and Yet. Luther's Legacy for Jewish-Christian Relations" revolves around a missed conversation and its consequences. It is not only a lesson in history, but also a call to see beyond the divides we live in.

Change is inevitable. Our understanding of ourselves, our faith and our knowledge of the world is constantly changing. So suggests Donald F. Murray in "The Death and Resurrection of God. The Story in a Post-Christian World." He points out that "as human history unfolds, we find ourselves sitting around the conference table at the Global Village" (120). His essay shows how poetry and vivid biblical imagery become essential parts of our multi-faceted interactions.

Fans of Tolkien might find familiar themes in "Literary Imagination and Theology. Protestant and Catholic Response to *The Lord of the Rings*" by Allen B. Robertson. Such names as Blake, Bunyan or C.S. Lewis are woven into this reflection on how "Protestants and Catholics diverge and cross over their understanding of the Word" (130) and the world. It is evident that, to engage with each other, both sides need imagination. *The Lord of the Rings* might just be the help that is needed.

Overall, the essays in *Living Traditions* offer an unforgettable journey through the thoughts of the Reformation, and how they echo in today's world. Theology is paired with lived experience, and looked at through the lens of art. Following this reading, I am left with hope and excitement, convinced that Protestant traditions are alive and well and contributing to the shape of Christianity. This book is a must-have for anyone invested in participating in those community conversations.

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