

Deep Hope Institute
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Green Discipleship

“If the Good News isn’t ‘green news,’ then we’re all a bunch of frauds. How can we love God and not be passionate lovers and caretakers of God’s marvelous creation?”

Nick Clark

I begin with the questions that frame these two addresses. The first is the subject itself, green discipleship.

Is there a “green” discipleship for a planet in jeopardy at human hands?

Addressing Earth and its distress is *the* moral assignment of our time. What has discipleship to do with it? What kind of discipleship honors the covenant explicitly deemed “everlasting,” the covenant between God and earth and every living creature of all flesh (Gen. 9)? And linking this to discipleship and the Spirit, have we forgotten the ecological perspective of patristic theology? There the Holy Spirit is the liberating power that sets all creation free, the peoples and the land, sea, and sky together.

The next three questions all qualify green discipleship for what I will call Christianity’s ecological phase, a new phase in the life of Christian faith.

Is there a non-imperial or an anti-imperial discipleship for us today? Christian discipleship was not only forged in the context of empire, it was forged as a way of life alternative to the empire’s. What does discipleship as an alternative to empire and as an expression of evangelical obedience mean for Christians, especially Christians carrying U. S. passports at a time when this nation is “noisy with believers” at home and feared and loathed abroad? What kind of theological malpractice made it even remotely possible for U. S. Christians to render Jesus pro-rich, pro-American, and pro-war? Moreover, while the subject of empire enjoys a lively discussion in Christian studies

these days, those studies largely neglect a critical dimension. Namely, that nature belongs to the empire now. Human domination is so far-reaching that no precincts of nature escape human impact. So is there a non-imperial or anti-imperial treatment of nature that belongs part and parcel to green discipleship?

Is there a discipleship of the Spirit? Discipleship is always associated, rightly, with following Jesus. But is this a proper reading if what Jesus himself does he does “in the power of the Spirit,” or, alternatively, “full of the Holy Spirit;” if his own testimony about his own mission in Luke 4 begins, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor;” and if he says he must depart so that the Spirit might dwell among his disciples, guide them, and produce in them the fruits of the Spirit as the fruits of discipleship itself? Or if Jesus dares to say his followers will, in the power of the Spirit, do even greater things than he? And please note: Paul speaks of the first Jewish-Christian discipleship communities as those who “were all made to drink of one Spirit.” (I Corinth. 12:13) Are we sufficiently Trinitarian in our discipleship? Have we inadvertently been reductionist about following Jesus? Jesus is utterly God-centered and Spirit-inspired and Spirit-led, and not, as Joseph Sittler once remarked, Christ-centered at all. So should our discipleship be more Christocentric than Jesus’s discipleship? And what about a vast number of our Christian neighbors? In no time at all, the modern Pentecostal movement has grown to nearly one-quarter of the global Christian flock. How will we be disciples together if *Spirit* discipleship is foreign to many of us? These are times of tumultuous change, times that called out for a shared sense of Holy Spirit dynamism as well as a shared sense of common earth citizenship. That leads to the third question.

Is there a worldly discipleship savvy about the play of power and human responsibility when privilege continues to reign, as it does, instead of rightly ordered relationships of mutuality? What kind of *power-savvy* discipleship is wise as a snake while pure as lambs and doves? Discipleship lives from utterly free grace. But its moral wisdom in a corrupt and crabby world does not come easily. We desperately need moral substance and moral weight in our politics, and that means a gracious discipleship that is power-savvy at the same time it calls us to act in accord with our better angels. Part of this is, as intimated above, the shift of power into human hands to affect all of nature. And, in any event, the unprecedented reach of human power has not been part of past discipleship. It must be now or we are “a bunch of frauds” (Clark).

The last framing element for green discipleship is the argument below that discipleship must go green because of the uniqueness of Christianity’s ecological phase and because there are renewable moral-spiritual resources that Christian faith brings to the table for this new phase. We have another place to stand, somewhat apart from the dominant forces bearing down on Earth. These give us another angle of vision and analysis, as well as other resources. I will illustrate some of these possibilities for green discipleship by turning to the two staples of life, bread and water, and treating them as the moral economy of the two basic sacraments of the Eucharist and baptism.

We turn, then, to the first address, on bread, water and Christianity’s ecological moment.

Bread and water, the staples of life for pilgrims, disciples and prisoners—take your pick, though we are all three. Bread has always been our food in the eating place just as the basic Christian strategy has always been to gather the folks, break the bread,

and tell the stories. “Gather the folks and break the bread” is literally what “company” means: “pan” is bread, “com” is “with.” “Com-pan-y” = to break bread together and tell stories. “We’re having company over” is one way to say “holy communion.”

Christian stories, then, are bread stories. *The* story, of course, is of Jesus and his people. It’s a bread story, a story of Exodus and unleavened bread and the creation of the people Israel, of Israel and manna in the wilderness and making a way where there was none, of Jesus and his loaves and fishes, healing and feeding ministry, his community of disciples, teaching them to pray, “Give us today the bread we need,” and his last Seder with them on the eve before the Empire tortured to death the “great and troublesome Rabbi.” And how did those on the Emmaus Way know the Rabbi was reborn into life and come to know him as God’s Own Self among them in the Spirit?¹ At table, in the burning of their hearts in the breaking of bread. Just so, too, have the People of the Way across tens of centuries and as many cultures known the Ancient of Days who, in the loaf and the fruit of the vine continues the journey with them. Bread rising, bread broken, bread shared. The Christian story is a bread story.

But what is the moral economy of breaking bread together in this moment of Christianity’s ecological phase? How do Christian meals together address a planet in jeopardy at human hands, the very hands that sow the seed, reap the harvest, knead the bread, drive the truck, put the loaf on the shelf, take it from the shelf, put it in the cart, and pay for it with plastic?

When the bread is the bread of the eucharist, that economy belongs to an economy of gratitude, grace and thanksgiving (*eucharistia*=thanksgiving). But what is

¹ The reference to this “great and troublesome Rabbi” and understanding him as “reborn into life” and “God’s Own Self” are from a meditation by Rabbi Arthur Waskow on Easter and Purim sent to me via e-mail by Dora Johnson, Washington, DC. No source is given for Rabbi Waskow’s words.

the economy of gratitude and broken bread in a broken world where some pantries and lands are emptied out while others are filled? What is the economy of bread if climate change means food shortages and bread riots? What is the economy of bread if fossil-fueled corporate agri-business is, on balance, more destructive than regenerative of sustainable livelihoods?

And then there is water, plain, unbottled water, two hydrogen molecules joined to one oxygen. You grew cell by cell in it until your birthing day, in your mother's warm, salty womb waters, and it's surer than taxes that you will die without it. Millions of creatures have lived without love; not a one has lived without water. That miniscule molecule sent from heaven above and now melting at the polar caps and in glaciers everywhere is the necessary condition not only for your life but for all the life upon which you depend. It is life's non-negotiable, simple and pure. These are the waters of life.

But be warned; Lord God Jehovah isn't making any more of the waters of life. The sum total of water has been fixed for a very, very long time, far longer than bi-pedal humanoids and all other creatures known to us have been splashing in it, laughing in it, and spilling it. Not just the same amount of water, but the very same water, recycles across the planet now as in prehistoric times. With care, energy, and a little love, you can grow more forests and wheat and kids; you cannot grow more water. Its forms change; so does its quality. But you drink the same earth-water Jesus and the Samaritan woman did, just as you breathe the same recycled air. Yours is a finite world and you're under house arrest, so get used to it. You're going nowhere where there are more oceans yet to fish, more rivers yet to be discovered and dammed, and more of the breath of life to be found.

To date at least, Habitat Earth is the only planetary household in the universe known to host conditions conducive to your life and any life. And even if it isn't, you're not packing a U-Haul for a studio in another galaxy.

The Christian story? It's a water story, a story of Genesis and the Spirit's parting of the waters above from the waters below to yield land, sea, and sky, a story of the Exodus and the parting of the Red Sea waters, of Moses and his staff and water in the wilderness, of Noah and the Great Flood and creation begun anew and the first and everlasting covenant between God and Earth, all peoples of the Earth and every living creature of all flesh (Gen. 9), of Jordan waters and Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer, and of Jesus at his last Seder, washing the dirty calluses of his disciples' dusty feet as the lasting sign of true authority, true leadership, true community. And how does the prophet image justice and righteousness? "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream." (Amos) It is also the story of tens of centuries of Christians across as many cultures, all gathered around the font or basin or wading in the water to sprinkle, pour, or immerse as the sign of new birth, of being born of water and the Spirit and belonging to the Body, the very Body of Christ. And when will you know that God has been raptured to Earth and the New Jerusalem has descended from heaven as a new heaven and a new earth? Not when houses of worship are planted on every corner. There is no temple in that redeemed city, as there was no temple in Eden. No "minstrel show of hate"² and no empire, either. There is the throne of God *and* "the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life, with its

² The phrase is from Maya Angelou's *A Brave and Startling Truth* (New York: Random House, 1995), no page numbers.

twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” (Rev. 22: 1-2, echoing Ezekiel) Christian faith is haunted by waters.

It is not alone. All religions are haunted by waters. Is there a single one without water rites? Moreover, these rites do not float out there on the margin; they stir near the sacramental center of religious traditions. They are commonly rites of initiation and purification, as befits a creature like us, emerging as we do from the waters of the womb into the world, only to besmirch the world as well as lend it greater beauty. Water refreshes, renews, and purifies both bodies and souls just as it births, cleanses, heals, revives, transports, rains down and wells up across the whole community of life. Indeed, legion is the number of *homo sapiens sapiens* who’ve become everyday mystics in the course of quiet moments as a “pilgrim at Tinker Creek” (Annie Dillard) or long hours beside crystal waters that seem to flow from the very throne of God, or dazzling ones while watching the sun sink into an endless ocean or the moon rise from it.

But what about baptism as the waters of life? What is the moral economy of sprinkling and pouring and wading in the water and studying war no more down by the riverside in a world that will be given more and more to warring over water or trying to survive and adapt to greater deluge and drought? What streams flow between the waters of life of baptism and Jehovah’s literal waters of life?

United Church of Santa Fe, the UCC congregation to which Nyla and I belong, has the plumbing right, I think. One side of the nave is a wall of glass, adobe and timbers, the eye’s passageway into the desert of which the sanctuary is a part: piñons and juniper scattered across sandy loam like the sower’s seed on arid ground; chamiso and

cottonwoods awaiting the next rush of rain in the arroyo; the Sangre de Christo Mountains rising in the distance; and the desert Sun near, very near, flooding yellow into the sanctuary. Sunrays glisten on the moving water that runs the entire length of the glass and adobe wall at its base. It is the baptismal font, if “font” is the right word for an *acequia*, the desert irrigation ditch of a thousand years of Pueblo peoples and four hundred years of Hispanic farmers in this valley. *Acequias* bear waters of life to this day, and when they run the desert blooms alongside them like an Isaiah vision. But if there is no *acequia* water, there is no bread and no laughter. The waters of life and the waters of life, the *acequia* baptism ditch and the grains of wheat that fall to the earth and die, only to grow green, then gold, then the color and aroma of bread rising, bread baking, bread broken, bread shared. Bread and water, water and bread. No water, no bread.

As I watch the sun dance on the moving waters in the sanctuary, I smile over a scene in Marilynne Robinson’s *Gilead*. “You and Tobias are hopping around in the sprinkler,” the old pastor writes. “The sprinkler is a magnificent invention because it exposes raindrops to sunshine. That does occur in nature, but it is rare. When I was in seminary I used to go sometimes to the Baptists down at the river. It was something to see the preacher lifting the one who was being baptized up out of the water and the water pouring off the garments and the hair. It did look like a birth or a resurrection. For us the water just heightens the touch of the pastor’s hand on the sweet bones of the head, sort of like making an electrical connection. I’ve always loved to baptize people, though I have sometimes wished there were more shimmer and splash involved in the way we go about it. Well, but you two are dancing around in your iridescent little downpour, whooping

and stomping as sane people ought to do when they encounter a thing so miraculous as water.”³

Some whooping and stomping and a little more shimmer and splash *is* in order when we encounter what St. Augustine calls “the standing miracle” of earth, air, fire and water, the standing miracle that far surpasses all those other occasional wonders we name miracles. But what is the economy of shimmering and splashing and pouring and digging *acequia* ditches in a world rudely destabilized by accelerating and extreme climate change?

Please note: climate change is not well explained as a few degrees variance in air temperature. That you can have as a change in the weather and you can have lots of changes in the weather without changes of climate. Climate change is about warming water and systemic changes in earth’s hydrological structures. It’s about increased trapped water vapor and more cloud activity and changed atmospheric currents off warming ocean waters, and more extreme storms, whether tornadoes, or hurricanes and cyclones, or snow and ice storms. It’s about melting icecaps and glaciers and rising seas and changes in ocean temperatures and currents. It’s about rain, or its absence, in shifting patterns of greater drought and deluge and the uneven migration and adaptation and life and death of flora and fauna and pollinators and pests and crops in response to long-term changes temperature and precipitation. In a word, it’s about the disruptions of too much water, too little water, and water too unpredictable. It’s also about the boost to vector-borne diseases, some of them, like malaria, cholera and typhoid, water-borne. Climate change is about the waters of life troubled in sufficient degree so as to destabilize the planet. It’s a slow tsunami.

³ Robinson, Marilynne, *Gilead* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2004), 63.

The baptismal waters of life and Earth's troubled waters of life: is there a connection, or has a central symbol and metaphor once again replaced the reality that yielded the symbol its power in the first place? Has map replaced territory yet again? Symbols and language are powerful creations and sometimes the symbols chosen and language used begin to stand apart from life as it's lived, only to issue in a disembodied or compartmentalized faith. I once suggested that we have a moratorium on all baptisms until all the children of the world have safe, potable water. Or, alternatively, that we consciously baptize with polluted water only, so as to tell, by way of sacrament, the gospel truth about the world. Neither suggestion got more than one vote—mine. OK, but what then is your theology and spirituality of living water on a planet that should in fact have been named "Water" rather than "Earth", since it is 70% H₂O, seven land masses bent over a great round water, and alive with life only because of land, sea, and sky waters?

In short, our subject is bread "broken for you" and the moral economy of eating together; and water poured out for you and the economy of the waters of life itself. What do eucharist and baptism mean for Christianity's ecological phase and a planet in jeopardy?

But why Christianity's *ecological* phase? Haven't stewardship and creation care always been there, even if in need of resuscitation? Why does green discipleship need more? Some has, most is very old, and much still has the power to shine. Take the second creation account and its command to humans "to till and care for" the garden. (Gen. 2:15) The Hebrew means "to serve and preserve" or "to serve and conserve" (*l'ovdah ul' shomrah*) and this command comes at the very origin of our species, long

before Sinai. It is in fact the human calling, the reason we are here. We are to be *shomrei 'ādāmā* --"guardians of earth."

And what, precisely, is *'ādāmā*? It's topsoil and that from which Adam (*ādām*) --"earth creature" or "earthling"--is created. English is no different: "humans" are from "humus," a fact worthy of a little "humor" and a good dose of "humility," together with a little less hubris! And, like *'ādāmā*, all else is from humus, too. That is the reason why, when Adam is alone, it not Eve who is created next in the second account, but all the other animals. Why might they be earthling's partner, companion and helpmate? Because they, too, are *'ādāmā*, they share the very same breath of God and, like Adam, they will return to *'ādāmā*. They are kin. Still, they are not quite bone of Adam's bone and flesh of Adam's flesh, and so Eve arrives. "Eve"--*Hava* in Hebrew--means "living." She is the bearer of life, "the mother of all who live." (Gen. 3:20) Adam and Eve signify, then, "Soil and Life." Soil and Life is our primordial identity. From these together arises our vocation to be "guardians of earth."

And the first covenant? It is not with Moses nor Abraham. It is with earth. Four times in ten verses God declares the covenant "with earth" and "every living creature of all flesh," "for all future generations." Yet in our human-centered reading of Scripture, we call this the covenant with Noah and his descendants. While it is a covenant that embraces all peoples of the earth, humanity is present here, not as God's other covenantal partner, but as enfolded into earth as partner and joint heir along with "every living creature of all flesh that is with you, all birds and cattle, all the wild animals with you on earth, all that have come out of the ark" (Gen. 9:10).

The prophets are clear on this. Hosea's version is this: "Then I will make a covenant on behalf of Israel with the wild beasts, the birds of the air, and the things that creep on the earth, and I will break bow and sword and weapon of war and sweep them off the earth, so that all living creatures may lie down without fear." (2:18) But whether you draw from Hosea, Isaiah, or Jeremiah, the outcome is the same. Creation is a seamless web and covenants, to cite Margaret Barker, comprise "the system of bonds which established and maintained the creation, ordering and binding the forces of chaos."⁴ Disregard of covenant bonds risks returning the planet to the "waste and void" of pre-creation, whereas keeping the covenant recovers the original affluence of Eden.

Or jump a millennium to the pre-Constantinian church. A favored image of early Christian theologians is that we are microcosms of the macrocosm: we are at home in the universe, the universe is at home in us. That profound understanding is now underwritten by a science they did not have and could not have imagined. The great theme across recent science, from theoretical physics and astrophysics to ecology, genetics and evolutionary biology is that the material universe—all of it—*is* literally a community, a cosmic community. It turns out we have belonged to the cosmos all along, not only by virtue of our longing and desire, or our dreams of empire, but because literally we are stardust. We are a late version of early supernova explosions. We are starseed. Evidently Plato wasn't wholly wacko when he said our souls come from the stars. And it turns out that the scale of Darwin's fabled Tree of Life is not only from molecules and cells to porpoises and apes and us, as Darwin thought, but includes ecosystems and beyond, to the heavens themselves. Every transient, watery cell of our

⁴ Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy*, p. 45, as cited in Michael Northcott, *A Moral Climate: the effects of global warming* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2007), 238.

bodies belongs to the galaxies, to the community of all life knit in uninterrupted DNA, and to motherly mitochondria millennia deep. Microcosm of the macrocosm we are.

Recent science, whether natural science, life science, or social science, also underwrites that early Christian vision of Earth as an *oikos*, a *single* “household,” a “house of being,” or, to use Martin Luther King’s image, a “world house.”⁵ All our “eco” words are *oikos* words—economics, ecology, ecumenics—because Earth is a vast but single household of life. Eco+logos, ecology, the logic of the house, knowledge of the life-systems necessary for good home economics. Eco+nomos, economics, the rules and laws of the household for its provisioning, meeting its material needs. And “ecumenics,” fostering the mutual up-building of the household, its unity and community. So those early Christians had it right, Earth as *oikos*, Habitat Earth. But what they did not know is that, in many and very quirky ways, all else is microcosm and household, too, not just us. The relatives are everywhere, and everything. All things great and small, from atoms to galaxies, share a common history and a common, if unfinished, story. All that exists, co-exists. All that is, belongs. Wildly diverse creation is one. This is good science and this is good religion. It takes a universe to create and to raise a child.

Isn’t retrieval such as this enough for Christianity’s ecological phase? When we add all the other good work in eco-theology and projects of the Australians like “The Earth Bible” volumes and the new “season of creation” in the church year, have we not adequately funded the faith for our moment in time?

No, for there is something new under the warming sun and it is a challenge to the faith that is of, well, biblical proportions. While good exegesis and the retrieval of Earth-honoring traditions in Christian faith are utterly necessary, they are also

⁵ The title of the last essay in King’s last book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*

insufficient. It is our fundamentally altered status in Earth/human relations that makes Christianity's ecological phase compelling. We have landed as humans in a place we've never been before, with powers we've never had. Neither Bible nor tradition, and precious little of science and reason, has known this place, these powers and these consequences. This is territory faith has not yet mapped. So we cannot simply assume that faith's precious and hard-won wisdom is still resonant or is all the wisdom we need. Neither can we assume that our past experience of the divine is due for an upgrade only; we may be on the edge of a new experience of the divine.

You can glimpse our altered status in our global consumption and our ecological footprint.

Bill McKibben asks how big we are, meaning the size of human claims on the earth. This is not so simple, he goes on to explain. Not only do we vary greatly in how much food and energy and water and bread and minerals we consume, but we vary over time. William Catton, McKibben recounts, once tried to calculate the amount of energy human beings use each day. In hunter-gatherer times it was about 2,500 calories, all of it food. That is the daily intake of a common dolphin. A modern human being uses 31,000 calories a day, most of it in the form of fossil fuel. That is the intake of a pilot whale. And the average American uses six times that—as much as a sperm whale, the fourth largest of all whales. We have become, in other words, different from the people we used to be—not kinder or unkind, not brighter or stupider; our natures seem to have budged little since Homer, probably not since Cain and Abel, and certainly not since Shakespeare. We have just gotten bigger. We appear to be the same species, with stomachs of the same size, but we are not. It is as if each of us were trailing a Macy's

Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon around, feeding it constantly. Now each of us needs not only a little plot of cropland and a little pasture for the meat we eat but also a little forest for timber and paper, a little mine, a little oil well. Giants have big feet. Scientists in Vancouver tried to calculate one such footprint and found that although 1.7 million people lived on a million lovely acres surrounding their city, those people required 21.5 million acres of land to support them: wheat fields in Alberta; oil fields in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq; tomato fields in Mexico.⁶

Jared Diamond comes at it a bit differently. “Several decades ago,” he writes, “many people considered rising population to be the main challenge facing humanity. Now we realize that it matters only insofar as people consume and produce.” Put all 6.5 billion of us in cold storage, neither producing or consuming, and we don’t have a problem. What matters is total world consumption, which is the product of local population times the local per capita consumption rate. And if you take what are called the “mature economies” of high mass consumption as the goal, which they are of, say, the developing world of China and India and Malaysia and Eastern Europe and South Africa and South America, and if you posit that they will catch up with the U. S., then world consumption rates would increase to the equivalent of Earth having a population of 72 billion people. Some optimists claim we can support a world with nine billion people. No one is crazy enough to claim we could support 72 billion. Yet we encourage developing nations to adopt the economic policies that will let them enjoy a first-world lifestyle.⁷ We’re even receiving checks from Washington soon to get people shopping

⁶ Bill McKibben, “A Special Moment in History: The Future of Population,” *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1998, 56-57.

⁷ Jared Diamond, “What’s Your Consumption Factor?”, *The New York Times*, January 2, 2008. (No page given in the archival source of this Op-Ed piece.)

again. It's a cruel hoax, since Earth is already strapped at every point in supporting the consumption of even one billion, not seventy-two or even nine. In fact, the people who determine our ecological footprint people have determined the month each year that we begin consuming Earth's capital itself, and not only the interest of nature's yield. We're eating the planet. This last year it was October and the date has been moving a bit earlier each year. This is ecological debt and it is far different from other debt. If you don't think so, try making more *'ādāmā*, topsoil, or more oil, water and air.

And if you don't think we are not massively bi-polar about economy and ecology, try finding investors for the two things certain to bring the biggest future returns, namely, a stable atmosphere and healthy eco-systems. Explain, if you can, how Wall Street can flourish while eco-systems crash. Your best explanation is bi-polar disorder on a mass scale. The chorus of voices telling us what we must do for the good of the human economy are different from the chorus of voices telling us what we must do for the economy of nature upon which all things, the human economy included, depend utterly.

You may take offense at the analogy of mass bi-polarism. OK, but find the name, then, that explains why the rhythms and requirements of human organizations override the rhythms and requirements of nature in our lives, when no organizations will survive unless healthy nature does; why our politics and economics are partitioned from any deep ecological sensibilities and vision; why the moral universe is only the human world and not the whole community of life and its claims; why even environmentalism is largely a search for market incentives and legal leverage to get governments and businesses to protect natural landscapes and stave off further destruction of habitat; and

why, in the end, the demands of consumers and those who meet them trump the nurturing of sustainers and those who provide for the good earth.⁸

Yet data on consumption and ecological footprint and debt don't disclose the full reason Christianity enters its ecological phase as a new venture in discipleship and a new chapter of it. It is this: the fundamental relationship of human beings to the rest of Earth has changed to the point that we have become one of nature's "forcings" on a grand scale, even one of the weather-makers. We have become a prime factor in charting evolution's course and determining who, among God's species, will make the journey and who will suffer the death of species birth itself. For most of its life, Planet "Water" has not been a humanly-dominated planet; and the quantum leap in human power, enabling us to affect all of life in fundamental and unprecedented ways, had not yet taken place. Now this "third rock from the sun" is a humanly-dominated planet simultaneously in jeopardy at human hands because of the greatly increased powers that restlessly reside in the hands of just one beautiful, mysterious, exuberant, invasive species. This is the story of species empire and imperial aggression that we must tell and understand if we are to be a People of the Way in our own time and place rather than a People of the Way attuned to other times and places different from this one.

(Incidentally, this is the story of empire and conquest and colonization that is largely missing from the otherwise lively discussion of empire in recent biblical and theological studies.)

There are many ways to tell even the same story, just as there are many liturgies of the meal and multiple meanings of baptism and eucharist. We need the many ways but

⁸ Elements of this paragraph are indebted to the unpublished paper of Kristian Eikevik, "Living Stories: Soil, Symbols and Markets," no page number.

I offer only one for the time still available in this session. Then in the next we will speak anew of bread and water in light of this narrative.

Histories of epochal transformations in Earth/human relations normally set the stage with the long period of hunter-gatherer humanity that is a full 95+% of the record. But, in terms of the human impact on the planet, that 95% is essentially benign. It's only prelude to the first genuine *revolution* in Earth/human relations, the series of changes over four or five thousand years labeled the Neolithic Revolution. The neolithic transformation, taking place simultaneously in Southwest Asia, China, and Mesoamerica, was vast and deep and resulted in the growth of settled societies; the emergence of cities and of craft specializations; the rise of powerful religions and philosophies with equally powerful accompanying social elites; the development of writing, horticulture, pottery, weaving, and many of the arts; the domestication of animals and plants; and the onset of population growth. Indeed, by about 2000 B.C.E. all the major crops and animals that belong to present agricultural systems around the world had been domesticated, even though agricultural systems themselves were dramatically altered in later epochs.⁹

To say it differently, this revolution self-consciously reconfigured nature for the sake of society and reorganized society in order to produce more effectively. From now on, and in great contrast to hunter-gatherer society, society became a *humanly* designed, ordered and set apart rendition of nature. Hunter-gatherers were not passive members of their environment, to be sure. Like every species they responded to their environment and changed it, though not dramatically. We know they had basketry and some weaving, apparently some small-scale irrigation and even dogs and pigs as domesticated animals. But nothing like the worlds of art, science, culture and agriculture we have come to know

⁹ Items about the Neolithic Revolution are from my *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, 55.

developed until human society found a way whereby a growing number of people were no longer engaged in the direct production of food. Then builders, architects, artists, priests, philosophers, and scientists, together with their creations, could be invented.

The mention of “priests” and the rise of “powerful religions and philosophies” needs a further word. Christianity and its elder, Judaism, assume in most every line of their sacred texts and across their practices the Earth/human relationships wrought by the Neolithic Revolution. There *are* echoes of hunter-gatherer life in the Garden of Eden account, with its life of original affluence—an abundance of fruits, nuts and plants to sustain life, without much human labor. Yet little of the 95% of human history in nature, as nature, and with nature is present in the holy writings and traditions. How massive that deficit is, with its concomitant loss of long-haul human intimacy with Earth, we shall never know.

But neither is the *second* great transformation of Earth/human relations—the Industrial Revolution and all that follows—present in the *formation* of the sacred texts and most all of Christian traditions. That, too, is a significant datum. It underscores the strange newness of Christianity’s ecological phase.

The benefits of the second great transformation have been huge. None of us wants to back up in time to live lifetimes only half as long; none wants to return to “the Great Mortality”¹⁰ of the Plague and the scourge of pandemic disease; none wants to live in the days before millions and millions were lifted from the misery of poverty. John Maynard Keynes says that from a couple thousand years before Christ until the 18th c., there was no great change in the standard of living for most peoples. At most the standard of living increased 100 percent over four millennia. Even 100 is not an impressive number over

¹⁰ What we call “the plague” was, at the time, called “the great mortality.”

that long a stretch. But when Thomas Newcomen scooped coal into a new kind of engine, a practical steam engine in 1712, and replaced the equivalent of five hundred horses, a new age was underway.

That new age for both humans and the rest of Earth was made possible by one thing: compact, stored energy in the form of fossil fuels—coal, oil, natural gas. And I dare say that your ministries, whether past, present, or prospective, were and are carbon-based. Your ordination vows did and will not include this, “I pledge myself to fossil-fuel ministry,” yet that’s the pledge effectively made. But as world oil production peaks and heads downhill amid still greater demand with yet higher prices and probably more conflict, and as, at the same time, global warming consequences heat up to severely restrict the burning of fossil-fuels, restrictions that themselves will entail great cost, we all need to ask what kinds of ministry address these civilization-altering events, the ecological peril, the social and psychological malaise, and inevitable conflict.

What stored fossil-fuel energy allowed was two illusions. We thought we could bypass the rhythms and requirements of nature that pre-industrial populations had to observe season in and season out. We could have our own built environment as our preferred habitat, a world created in our own image, and soon we did not even bother to ask about nature’s demands for regeneration and renewal on its own complex, leisurely and non-negotiable terms. We forgot that every human economy is always and everywhere utterly a part of the economy of nature.

Bypassing nature’s rhythms and requirements for its own regeneration on its own terms made possible the second illusion. Namely, that we could bring nature under our control and liberate humankind from futility and toil. We now know that planetary

processes are not only more complex than we think; they are probably more complex than we can ever think. They are certainly more complex than we can master and control.

Life lived inside these two illusions, when coupled with massive supplies of stored energy and the powers of modern science and technology tied to the industrial paradigm of extraction, production, and consumption, exclusively for human ends, has had these consequences: no precincts of other-than-human nature, from genes to grasslands to glaciers, are exempt from human impact and change. The rest of nature has no independent life apart from us now. Nature belongs to the empire of its most aggressive species. Our *primary* relationship to the rest of nature is “use” and its *primary* status is as object, not fellow subject. Non-human nature is “it” rather than “thou.”

The uninvited blow to both these illusions—that we can control nature and its own rhythms and requirements can be bypassed in favor of human organization and habitat—is accelerated and extreme climate change and every major life system in decline. Add to this what we noted earlier, namely, utterly unsustainable production and consumption. If Alan Durning is correct, global consumer classes produced and consumed as many goods and services in the half century from 1950-2000 as throughout *the entire period of history prior to that date.*¹¹ And the beat goes on in the 21st c.

Yet the beat cannot go on, and that has brought us to the brink of the third great transformation of Earth/human relations. Thomas Berry names it our “Great Work.” Every civilization and people has its Great Work. In Berry’s account “the Great Work of the classical Greek world [was] its understanding of the human mind and the creation of

¹¹ Alan T. Durning, *How Much is Enough?* (London: Earthscan, 1992), 38.

the Western humanist tradition; the Great Work of Israel [was] articulating a new experience of the divine in human affairs; the Great Work of Rome [was] in gathering the peoples of the Mediterranean world and of Western Europe into an ordered relation with one another... The Great Work [of India was] to lead human thought into spiritual experiences of time and eternity and their mutual presence to each other with a unique subtlety of expression... In America the Great Work of the First Peoples was to occupy this continent and establish an intimate rapport with the powers that brought this continent into existence in all its magnificence.” And our Great Work, the task of this and the next several generations is to effect “the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans [are] present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner.”¹²

The chief obstacles to this third great transformation will not be technological. Sustainable and regenerative technologies already exist in part and can be elicited with the proper political-economic incentives. The chief obstacles will be the political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions of a way of life that remains addicted to fossil fuels, that has not come to terms with the limits of planetary systems, that assumes that happiness is based on never-ending material consumption of goods and services, and that thinks and invests for short-term rather than long-term ends in a political economy that operates with a wholly different metabolism than the metabolism of nature’s economy.

The most basic issue, then, is *how* we live, and *for what*—the classic issue of discipleship itself. And it is at this crucial juncture that moral and religious convictions and commitments are vital to a successful transformation. A spirituality and ethic for the long-haul is needed, one that receives life as a gift, knows our (humus) place in creation,

¹² Thomas Berry, *The Great Work* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 1-4.

and knows as well the significance of our striving, even in the face of inevitable corruptions, losses and defeats.

For this spirituality and morality, the deep traditions shared by many faiths are wells of living water and stores of bread for the journey. They are, or might be, alternative renewable moral-spiritual resources that address forces which are, on balance, destructive. Asceticism and the simplified life addresses consumerism; all material reality as sacred addresses treating all goods as things valued only for their end-use, as commodities; the mystical addresses all things treated as objects only and “use” as our primary relationship to the rest of nature; the prophetic addresses oppression and offers the power for systemic change; and wisdom traditions offer powers of discernment and prudent judgment.

Yet none of these millennial families of tradition is pristine. Not only have they suffered their own corruptions, in the manner of all things human; they were all forged in the first great transformation of Earth/human relations, the Neolithic, then significantly revised under the impact of the second, the Industrial. Thus do they all require, now, their own new attunement to place and our moment in time, i.e., their own conversion to Earth and re-conversion to God.

Ours, then, is one of those rare gateways of time¹³ that comes ‘round now and then. It is time’s gateway when one age, and often climate, gives way to the next amidst all the beauty and terror of death and opportunity, a time when faith must venture where it has not have ventured before, to cross rivers it has not crossed before, even though the pattern may be the familiar one of dying and rising, old age and new and being born again. In any

¹³ The image is from Tim Flannery, *The Weather Makers: how man is changing the climate and what it means for life on earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 46.

case, this is a faith venture essential to the Great Work before us. Christianity's ecological phase is asked of us, and the planet is needful of it.

Such is the frame in which we next think anew about bread and water and about the contribution to the Great Work of a sacramental look at the economy of eating and pouring.

Bread, Water and the Economy of the Sacraments

Recall our basic quest. We are in quest of a non-imperial, Spirit-led, and power-savvy discipleship that makes a constructive contribution to Christianity's ecological phase and the Great Work before us. We are illustrating some of the possibilities for this green discipleship by reflecting on bread and water as staples of life, and sacraments, for a planet in jeopardy at human hands.

In 1931 Thomas Edison chatted up Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone. This is what Edison said. "I'd put my money on the sun and solar energy. What a source of power! I hope we don't have to wait until oil and coal run out before we tackle that." Edison's choice of Ford and Firestone as his audience, i.e., tailpipes and smokestacks, probably wasn't a wise one if his goal was to sell solar power. In any event fossil fuels and the second great transformation of Earth/human relations were irresistible.

Irresistible, but unsustainable. Irresistible, but not viable for our future and our children's. So now it's back to Edison's future and other ways to embark on the third great transformation, from a destructive human presence in the community of life to a mutually enhancing one with our creaturely kin, indeed with land, sea, and sky en toto.

A healthy biosphere and a stable atmosphere, both conducive to life as we know it, is no longer the “given” faith can assume. On a wounded and fevered planet, it is a outcome of choice and aspiration, a holy grail, and, if successful, a momentous achievement.

None of us should underestimate the difficulty of the Great Work, nor fail to understand why green spiritualities facing multiple fears are as much life requirements as green technologies. Put it this way, as a kind of “rinse and repeat” of the previous lecture. For the entire period of hunter-gatherer existence and much of Neolithic life, the human story was an expression of the earth story. The second great transformation, the industrial revolution, reversed that. Earth became an expression of the human story, all things having been absorbed into the human universe and altered as though *there* they were to live and move and have their proper being. Thus, in 2008, we begin with earth as an expression of the human story; we begin with a humanly dominated planet. Yet we must of rude necessity find our way once again to incarnate ourselves as humble expressions of earth’s story, since we are not masters and creation is not our empire. Of course, we cannot return to hunter-gatherer ways, Neolithic, or other pre-industrial ones. We begin with the humanly destabilized planet, and must move away from the deeply-structured devastation of industrial modernity and the ecological dead-zone of most post-modern thought. This is a leg of the pilgrim journey we and Earth have not made before; thus the need for Christianity’s ecological phase as part of the third great transformation¹⁴

¹⁴ I am indebted to Kristian Eikevik, St. Olaf College, and his paper, “Living Stories: Soil, Symbols and Markets,” for a portion of this formulation of earth story/human story. (No page numbers.)

But what can a greening faith bring to the task of generations we embark upon? We indulge but a taste. In this case, we bring to the table bread, water and an economy of the sacraments.

A Sunday *New York Times* article caught my eye. Entitled “Saving Souls and Salmon,” it begins with Archbishop Alex Brunett standing at the baptismal font of St. James Cathedral in downtown Seattle. “The water isn’t just sitting there,” he explains to *Times* reporter Jim Robbins. “We don’t baptize people in stagnant water, but flowing water, water that is alive.”¹⁵ The living waters of life (baptism) and the water of life of, in this case, the Columbia River and its salmon, was the connection and, for the Archbishop, the connection was sacramental. Saving souls and saving salmon belong to the same universe, the same material universe and the same moral universe.

“The Columbia River Watershed: Realities and Possibilities” is a bioregional pastoral letter of Roman Catholic bishops in Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia. (As an aside, please note that here “bioregional” dissolves the border between the U. S. and Canada and looks at health and well-being for both human souls and salmon from the standpoint of the watershed. It’s hard to think like a watershed, but it’s necessary now.) Unbridled logging, mining, grazing and dam building have, over a century of fossil-fueled industry, left the great river and its basin in dire straits, if its emblem—the salmon—is any measure. The annual run of an estimated 16,000,000 salmon has dwindled to about 700,000.¹⁶

No less arresting is the name the bishops have given the endangered watershed: a “sacramental commons.” “We’re trying to establish a sacredness in the world around

¹⁵ “Saving Souls and Salmon,” *The New York Times* Week in Review, 22 October, 2000: 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

us,” the Archbishop explained to Robbins. Establishing such sacredness assumes the lead tenet of all sacramental traditions, Christian and other. Namely this: the goodness of creation means that all material reality bears a value humans share and name but do not bestow and cannot veto. Don Sampson, a Yakima Indian leader, chuckled in response to the Columbia declared a sacramental commons. “Maybe God has spoken to [the bishops]. I hope the pope gets on board.” He added, in a more serious tone, “The church is being up front and dispelling the myth of Manifest Destiny and dominion over the Earth. That’s refreshing and welcome.”¹⁷

Sacramentalism hasn’t always been poised over against dominion. The most influential Christian cosmology of all, the Great Chain of Being, bundled sacrament, dominion and domination together and sent them sailing the high seas to colonize the ineptly-named “New World”. Pope Alexander VI’s famous “Bull of Donation” simply gave—donated—all island and mainlands “discovered and to be discovered, on hundred leagues to the West and South of the Azores toward India,”¹⁸ and not already occupied or held by any Christian king or prince as of Christmas 1492, to Isabel and Ferdinand of Spain. The pope was utterly clear: European Christian monarchs should rule the whole world, spread civilization, and save the benighted souls of non-Christian brothers and sisters. Called “donation,” this was in fact “taking” on the grandest scale, in the guise of giving. It was “taking”—“stealing” would be another word—in the form of the establishment of neo-European societies on every continent of the planet except Antarctica, and all via the same pattern: conquest and colonization, commerce and

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Cited from Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Toronto: between the lines press, 1997), 1. Shiva is citing the bull’s text from Walter Ullmann’s *Medieval Papalism* but she does not supply the bibliographic data.

Christianity, tied together as “civilization.” The fifth “c,” “capitalism,” would soon join them to effect much the same end: global settlement, rule, and privilege.

That said, Great Chain dominion and domination was even more than the ordering of peoples as superior and inferior, just as it was more than this civilizing mission. Like all cosmologies, it was an inventory of all reality and its ordering, with God as Pure Mind and Spirit at the top of the ladder, the angelic hosts next, humanity just a little lower than the angels, other mammals a rung below and on down through the lower life forms until we hit inorganic matter and rock bottom. Add the distinctions within the human links of the chain. Not only the aforementioned division of superior and inferior peoples and civilizations, but males a notch above females and (higher) reason, mind and spirit properly ruling (lesser) body and emotion, etc. Add as well the spirituality of ascent that accompanied this cosmology: i.e., the closer you moved toward union with God as Pure Spirit and Mind, the more you left Earth and body behind. While all of reality is included in this spirituality, and all is God’s, this manner of Christian faith is not, in the end, Earth-honoring. It served subjugation of both peoples and the rest of nature well. For the most part, it served industrialization and capitalism well. But it did not serve Earth well.

Yet this millennial cosmology was a genuinely sacramental one. That is, the Great Chain of Being pictured life as an outflowing of the divine in an endless array of diverse, interdependent life forms. For all sacramentalism the universe is alive, the universe is manifold, and the universe is whole, and so it was for the Great Chain of Being as well, even when it ordered all of it in ways that inscribed dominion of humans over the rest of nature and domination of some humans over others. This conviction of the divine presence in all material reality, animating all life in an endless flow of energy

and with a bias toward the triumph of life, is vital even though it has been corrupted ever and again by injustice and worse. It is vital because later industrialization will, in effect, require the death of nature as sacred and of value on more-than-human terms.

The bishops' bioregional pastoral rejects dominion and domination sacramentalism. Its alternative is also a sacramental economy, however, and it's outlined in another pastoral letter, this one from the U. S. Catholic conference. "Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action in Light of Catholic Social Teaching" shifts the reigning metaphor from a ranked ladder to "the web of life [as] one." Assuming this life web, the bishops "explore the links between concern for the person and for the earth, between natural ecology and social ecology."¹⁹ And like all sacramentalists, the bishops view creation as a "commons" with intrinsic linkages "between natural ecology and social ecology." In this tradition the earth's goods have a universal destination in accord with "the common good" or "the common welfare."

The bishops do not cite the little 18th century ditty that appeared at the time of the English Enclosure Act, but it's relevant: The law doth punish man or woman/That steals the goose from the common/But lets the greater felon loose/That steals the common from the goose.²⁰ Neither theft is commended but to steal or destroy earth as the first and enduring condition of life is the greater felony.

The bishops might also have cited the sacramentalism of St. Ambrose, with its firm sense of the *human* common good. "Why do the injuries of nature delight you?" Ambrose asked in 4th c. Milan, "the world has been created for all, while you rich are

¹⁹ U. S. Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action in Light of Catholic Social Teaching* (Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, November 14, 1991), I. A. Aims of This Statement, p. 2.

²⁰ Author unknown. Cited here from the frontispiece of Howard L. Parsons, compiler and editor, *Marx and Engels on Ecology* (Westport: CT: Greenwood Press, 1977).

trying to keep it for yourselves. Nor merely the possession of the earth, but the very sky, air and the sea are claimed for the use of the rich few...Not from your own do you bestow on the poor man, but you make return from what is his. For what has been given as common for the use of all, you appropriate for yourself alone. The earth belongs to all, not to the rich.”²¹

Ambrose assumes that “the injuries of nature” will continue to “delight” some unless there is a change of heart and practice. In this he is in accord with the bishops’ letter: “We need a change of heart to preserve and protect the planet for our children and for generations yet unborn.”²²

But where is there power to change? The bishops answer as good sacramentalists do: “In the sacramental universe itself,” they say. Nature bears God’s presence and power, the finite bears the infinite, the transcendent is imminent, the divine lurks blessedly in, with, and under all things natural. “Throughout history,” the bishops write, “people have continued to meet the Creator on mountaintops, in vast deserts, and alongside waterfalls and gently flowing springs. In storms and earthquakes, they found expressions of divine power. In the cycle of the seasons and the courses of the stars, they have discerned signs of God’s fidelity and wisdom. We still share, though dimly, in that sense of God’s presence in nature.”²³

Earth itself is the sacrament here—i.e., a disclosure of God’s presence and power by visible and tangible signs, like the moving waters of baptism and the living waters of the Columbia River and its salmon, or the bread of heaven at the altar and the bread

²¹ *De Nabuthe Jezraelita* 3, 11, as cited by Rosemary Radford Ruether in: “Sisters of Earth: Religious women and ecological spirituality,” *The Witness* (May, 2000): 14.

²² U. S. Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth* I., D. A Call to Reflection and Action, p. 3.

²³ U. S. Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth* III. Catholic Social Teaching and Environmental Ethics, p. 6.

broken when company comes. Transcendent power is as close as the grain and the grape, the oil, water and wine of the liturgy, and the fields, forests and waterways around us. Those who reverence God's presence in creation and know themselves to be part and parcel of the world as sacrament will be moved, moved to care for creation as "the sacred trust" it is, say the bishops.

You can hear the same from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox communion. This is from the "Symposium on the Sacredness of the Environment" in Santa Barbara, California: "The Lord suffuses all of creation with His Divine Presence in one continuous legato from the substance of atoms to the Mind of God. Let us renew the harmony between heaven and earth, and transfigure every detail, every particle of life."²⁴

Creation as "one continuous legato" is one major theme of the sacramental economy, nicely imaged in the Celtic knot of high Irish crosses—no beginning, no end, just an ongoing weave and web up and down and across the cross. Another theme is life as the freely-offered *gift of God* and the *medium of grace*, a gift ritually borne into the worshipful presence of God and renewed there in contemplative and liturgical practices. In this tradition the drama of the liturgy is the ritual enactment of cosmic community and the redemption of all creation. Not surprisingly, the Eucharist itself is central, since creation's redemption is caught up in the Passion of Jesus and his last Seder. But the moral ethos of this way of being in the world is also signaled in the word itself. *Eucharistia* means "thanksgiving" and is a word implying liturgy and ritual as the form of people's grateful response. It is, as well, *a guide for their living*. If the bread of heaven "broken for you," and the cup of salvation poured out for you, is shared freely and equally with all as God's own way, and if all are welcome at this Welcome Table without

²⁴ Address of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Ecumenical Symposium, p. 8.

qualification, why do we not live so as to make it so for the other tables of the world? And if this bread of life and cup of blessing is a great unmerited good shared in common, why would we delight in “the injuries of nature” that steal “the common from the goose”—or from the neighbors’ pantries near and far?

The eucharist and baptism, bread, drink, and water, as elements of web-of-life sacramentalism only begin to line out the music for Christianity’s ecological phase and green discipleship. Yet even here we can sense how sacramentalism is almost the antithesis of the working cosmology and theology of the institutions and practices of the modern world. Modern institutions and practices not only subordinate the earth story to the human story; they feed off a plastic view of nature. Nature is reduced to “natural resources” and “capital,” now extended to “human resources” and “capital,” even “moral” and “spiritual resources” and “capital.” These betray a market mindset that is utilitarian with a vengeance and simply devoid of sacramental and mystical sensibilities. They belong to Max Weber’s “disenchanted” world in which the numinous is bled from the common, the holy is leached from the ordinary, and the mystical is drained from the everyday. We are left with the imperial reign of material “stuff” in the mighty Kingdom of Stuff. Use, utility, and possession measure value, with all these relative to human appropriation and significance. The human subject determines the worth of all else, as object, and nature’s most valued form is that of commodities.

Of course there must be use and utility. Life requires life, even the taking of life, for ongoing life. Bodily needs must be met—food, raiment, shelter, good work, hugs and festivity—and that means use and utility. It means the subject/object relationship as a basic relationship. Subject/object is even a *primary* word, in Martin Buber’s sense in his

classic work, *I and Thou*. We are bio-social creatures by nature. We are relational creatures by nature; “biological” and “social” together is constitutive of our being. Thus Buber hyphenates the two primary words—I-it and I-thou. Not I and it or I reaching out to it, not I and thou, or I contemplating thou, as though I were a self-contained unit putting out contracts. Rather, I-it and I-thou, a relational being by nature as subject internally related to object, as subject internally related to subject.

What has transpired via the second great transformation in Earth/human relations is that industry—“the power industry, the defense industry, the communications industry, the transportation industry, the agriculture industry, the food industry, the health industry, the entertainment industry, the mining industry, the education industry, the law industry, the government industry, ...the religion industry,”²⁵ even now the hospitality industry—is that we have dropped “I-thou” as a core word and made “I-it” the dominant word—and the dominant sense of self. The human subject is arrayed over against all else as object. I-it, object-in-relationship to subject, defines the self itself. This is not sacramental; this is imperial.

Put differently, there is a huge difference between “use” as a secondary relationship necessary to supplying basic material needs and “use” as *the* determinative relationship of the human being to everything on earth and in heaven. Father John Chryssavgis is on point: “We have progressed to the point where we know better than to treat people like things. It is now time that we learn no longer to treat even things like

²⁵ Wendell Berry, “Does Community Have a Value?”, *Home Economics* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987), 179.

things, although this practice can only come from an altered perspective and a changed heart.”²⁶

No longer treating “even things like things” will be difficult in part because bread and water and all else now take the use-form of commodities, and commodities are inherently end-use objects. “Commodity” is from *commodus*, which translates to “convenience.” A product, whether a good or service, that is “commodious” is useful to us and at our disposal without burdening us in any way. Where it came from, who made it from what, what its true costs are to people and land, sea, and sky, how it was transported all those many miles and what that cost the planet, where it goes when we’ve disposed of it and what that costs—all this is hidden from view and rendered subordinate to its usefulness to the consumer. All that is seen and counts is end use. From all the rest, the consumer is alienated in the genuine sense—the relationships bound up in the making, transporting, using, and disposing of the good are alien, foreign, to the user, and the user is oblivious to those real relationships, if not downright glad not to be involved.

So at least ponder this question: what way of life is created, and what way of life is forsaken, when com-pan-y as “breaking bread together”—the meaning in “we’re having company over” as a way of saying holy communion—is replaced by “company” as the commercial enterprise supplying bread as a commodity in a relationship that is “moneyed” from beginning to end, from the seed sown to the bread buttered? What happens to both soul and nature when a wholly utilitarian ethic leaches life, and nature, of the sacred and mysterious, of their reality as subject and their life as “thou”? What happens when the verb form—“co-modify,” implying a subject-to-subject relationship and conscious work together with nature, including other humans—is dropped and all

²⁶ Fr. John Chryssavgis, *Beyond the Shattered Image* (Minneapolis: Light & Life Publishers, 1999), 15.

that is left is the static noun form—“commodity,” meaning nature reduced to replaceable object.²⁷ The answer may be identical to Wendell Berry’s judgment of the consumerist ethos: “We’re not getting something for nothing. We’re getting nothing for everything.”²⁸

Be warned: no longer treating “even things like things” and instead apprehending them as living elements of a sacramental economy will be difficult for another reason—clever language. While the world is more commodified than ever, and relationships are more moneyed than ever, personalized and relational web-of-life language—I-thou language--has replaced the impersonal mechanistic language of industry and a mechanical universe. We are thereby lulled into thinking “I-thou” relationality has made a comeback and somebody out there cares for our souls when in fact utility and commodification have only learned to speak web-of-life language and the language of subjectivity and personal feeling and desire. While examples are legion, this one will suffice.

An ad that appeared in *The New York Times* on June 2, 1998, the day New York’s American Museum of Natural History opened its new Hall of Biodiversity. It displays an eye-catching selection of flora and fauna from around the world. Running across the top in large letters is the sentence: “We believe in equal opportunity regardless of race, creed, gender, kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, or species.” The creatures then tumble down the page, followed by somewhat smaller-lettered text: “All life is interconnected. So without a supporting cast of millions of species, human survival is far from guaranteed. This variety and interdependence of species is what’s

²⁷ The contrast of verb and noun forms is from Kristian Eikevik’s unpublished paper, “Living Stories: Soil, Symbols and Markets,” no page number.

²⁸ Wendell Berry, *Life is a Miracle* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint Press, 2000), Dedication Page.

called biodiversity. And it matters to Monsanto in particular. Our business depends on making discoveries in the world of genetic information. Information that is lost forever when a species becomes extinct. Information that offers solutions in agriculture, nutrition, and medicine never before thought possible. For a population that's growing. On a planet that's not." The logo—a growing plant—then appears next to the name and trademark: Monsanto: Food Health Hope. The last line is: "Monsanto is honored to be a sponsor of the Hall of Biodiversity at the American Museum of Natural History.

www.monsanto.com."

This ad is unthinkable apart from recent sciences and their impact, genetics and molecular biology, ecology, and computing sciences, especially. Its thought-world appears to be holistic thinking, succinctly put and based in good science. The awareness of complex, living interdependence seems central. At the outset the ad even strikes a notion of egalitarian bio-democracy worthy of St. Francis. But by the bottom of the page we are keeping company with the soft utopianism and secular promise-and-fulfillment theology of so much biotechnology: "Monsanto: Food Health Hope" and "solutions in agriculture, nutrition, and medicine never before thought possible." (The slogan of rival ADM is in the same vein: "The nature of things to come.") We are also keeping company with human subjectivism in ethics. That is, this moral universe not only assumes that human beings are *the* sole moral arbiters; it assumes that in the end the only actions that matter are the ones affecting human beings. No court of appeal beyond the human subject exists. And by the very bottom, right hand corner of the page, we have placed good science and a viable way of life ("Food, Health, Hope") firmly in the hands of global *eco*-modern business. The famous dualisms of the Great Chain of Being are no

longer present, since long-standing boundaries of mind and matter, human culture and resistant nature, and the sharp distinctions of humans from other creatures, have been erased in favor of “equal opportunity regardless of race...phylum...class...genus, or species” in a world where “[a]ll life is interconnected.” Yet the actual practice of science and technology features human mind and culture as the creators, controllers, and high-tech bio-cowboys who work ecosystems and genomes as they would their ranchlands. These creatures are generic, not particular. They are not even truly creatures, as biological individuals; they are categorically “information” and “resources.” Humans are thereby re-centered as masters without qualification, despite webbed interdependence, and ecology, molecular biology, genetics, and evolution itself find themselves, as practiced science, in the employ of a morality that views “all things bright and beautiful,” “all creatures great and small,” even “all things wise and wonderful”—to remember a hymn—as information, resources, and property; in short, as capital pure and simple. So in only one striking page, what begins as a confession of web-of-life bio-democracy ends as (indispensable) user-friendly exploitation that promises, yet one more time, to do good by doing well, for profit and without (human) sacrifice.

To say it differently: genetics as a science may render us kin to roundworms, to say nothing of giraffes and bonobos. Ecology may map in gratifying detail the awesome webbing of life. And Evolution with a capital “E” may present a dynamic universe still on its pilgrim way, with us a stupendous expression of starseed, even if only a wink in its regime of time. Yet these sciences are captured by our political economy for an ethic that retains industrial modernity’s hubris as that is married to entrepreneurial courage, engineering confidence, and commodity exchange. Life here is still chiefly a production,

management and security problem, subject to technological remedies based in rigorous science and the wizardry of the market. Life is not a species problem, or a problem of the human soul or spirit, or a matter of evil and injustice and things going wildly awry on a regular basis by incremental means, or a matter of an errant way of life.

This is not Earth community and web-of-life sacramentalism, even when the language is that of relationality, interdependence and essential human yearnings for such as food, health, hope. This is Earth as a vast mine. This is commercial modernity, still extracting and displacing, only now in ecological mode. Nature is there for us, full stop. From kingdom to kingdom, phylum to phylum, species to species, gene to gene, atom to atom, and sea to shining sea.

Whatever moral and spiritual sensibilities and emotions are on display here, and whatever (supposedly) pragmatic ethic reigns in these quarters, they are not those of the sacramental imagination. Earth is not a sacrament here and life is not a gift. Profound gratitude is not the wellspring of ethics; possession, utility, and the ownership society are. Grace, mercy, forgiveness, renewal and rebirth in common ritual and daily habit is not the common fare here; the give-and-take of market morality is—getting, having, using, spending. In this world, we can hardly understand the closing page of Annie Dillard at Tinker Creed: “I think the dying pray at the last not ‘please,’ but ‘thank you,’ as a guest thanks his host at the door.”²⁹

Before I finish on a constructive rather than deconstructive note, I must comment to our understanding of eucharist. As noted last evening, Christianity’s ecological phase means not only bringing the riches of the faith to bear on the powers bearing down on us in our gateway of time, it also means those deep traditions

²⁹ Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (Bantam Books, 1975), 278.

themselves will, as living traditions, need to be transformed in order to render more faithful service. What was a minor theme heretofore may emerge front and center. What was forgotten or lost may be remembered and recovered. What is remembered may be adapted as well as adopted.

So let us revisit eucharist. Given the importance of meals in the ministry of Jesus, it is hardly a surprise that eating and feasting play a central role in the worship of his followers after his death, resurrection and ascension. And recall that when they gathered on the first day of the week, it was not in synagogues or in the Temple, but in their homes, around table. Table in fact replaced altar, or table became altar, like the Friday night Shabbat meal itself. Worship centered on table fellowship and these first eucharists were real meals, not token meals. Yes, they were but “a foretaste of the feast to come,”³⁰ but they were real feasts. Moreover, they were meals not only symbolizing only the death of Christ in an atonement theory centered on sacrifice for our sins. This food in the eating place and drink in the drinking place, this Christian feasting together, was an acted parable of a moral economy deeply rooted in the economy of the Torah, in righteous living as a covenanted way of life. This is a meal of the Kingdom, a little Jubilee, a foretaste of the Messianic banquet, and, for the early Christians, an alternative to the way of the Roman Empire. Here, in this Eucharist, the poor no longer have their land expropriated from them for the benefit of the rich, but richer and poorer fast and feast together and raise a common voice in worship *as* they break bread together and *in* the breaking of bread together. The body of Christ was an alternative polity to Rome’s imperial polity and so was the Body’s eating and drinking an alternative moral economy. Tables are always microcosms of society itself. Here it was as well. But it was not bread

³⁰ A phrase from the Lutheran eucharist liturgy.

crusts for the servants, who eat elsewhere and later, and wine for the rich, who are served first. Rather, it is bread broken and shared, and wine poured and passed, for all around the welcome table of rich and poor, weak and strong, healthy and frail, young and old, women and men, bond and free, together. Yes, they, too, had their ingrained version of “you can get the people out of Egypt, but you can’t get Egypt out of the people.” Paul in Corinth has to tell the story of manna in the wilderness all over again because not all in Corinth could get Empire out of their colonized hearts and minds. Such hangovers meant the re-intrusion of privilege in the body of rich and poor together, whereas manna and the economy of the Torah meant that the people should gather only what they needed and not hoard or try and store up manna. The Corinthians, instead of sharing equally, were creating a table at which some had too much while others went hungry away.

My point is simple: unlike eucharist in our churches (or holy communion or the Lord’s Supper) the early Christians did not have two different economies in mind—the economy of salvation and redemption and the economy of food. Both were enacted in the bread and wine at table together. To break bread blessed in the name of Jesus as *kyrios*/Lord/Caesar was a profoundly political action which modeled a different moral economy to that of the other Caesar.

But not only that. This food was received and consumed as the gracious gift of God, Creator of all that is, was, and will be. The blessing and breaking and sharing of bread and wine in fact gathers up the creation/redemption ethic of the ancestors of Israel who ate manna and quail in the wilderness and worshiped the God who provided physical and spiritual sustenance together.

There is, then, in the economy of the Eucharist so much more than a token memorial meal or meal of sacrifice. The redemption of creation is the drama here, displayed in microcosm via real table fellowship by a People of the Way who embody an alternative to the destructive political economy of Empire and its order of entrenched inequalities.³¹ Exactly the same can be said of baptism and its washing off of the old to enter anew as citizens of another society (Body) belonging to another Kingdom.

Any who know recent New Testament studies on this subject know my brief sketch does only injustice to good work in the Gospels, Acts and Paul. There is so much more that brings these meals of early Christian eating together to the heart of eco-justice and social justice merged. There is equally much in the waters of life of baptism and a new, redeemed creation in the Christ of the cosmos. But for the moment this must suffice and serve as the segue to a few final guidelines drawn from the moral economy of sacramental bread and water.

The necessary preface is this. We ask what guidelines are *congruent* with an economy of the sacraments. What accords with sacramental cosmologies and moral and esthetic sensibilities? What draws deeply from the goodness and beauty of creation and seeks *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world?

To ask what is *congruent* with sacramentalism is to leave space for peoples of multiple persuasions and varied religious commitments, or even no religious commitments at all. The Earth Charter is an example of how well this can work to achieve a good in common, though I can only point you to the charter and draw upon it, as well as on the work of Daniel Spencer and Cynthia Moe-Lobeda.

³¹ This section on eucharist draws extensively on the discussion of Michael Northcott in his *A Moral Climate*, 251-261, "The Eucharist and Christian Eating."

Here is but one principle from The Earth Charter and some guidelines that follow, simply as illustration.

“Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth’s regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.”³² This already shifts the aim of economic life “from maximizing the production of goods and services to a three-part agenda of production, relatively equitable distribution, and ecological regenerativity. All economic activity will need to operate within the ecological limits of the planet. This also shifts economic activity away from growth and mass consumption as the signature of “mature economies.” “Growth” may still be a good, and consumption a necessity, but they are qualified in the following ways. Growth and consumption a) “must be ecologically sustainable or regenerative for the long term; b) must reduce rather than increase the wealth and income gaps within and between nations [aside: climate change will be worse for the poor and for already marginal lands; more equitable distribution and attention to regenerativity will afford greater resources for mitigation and adaptation]; c) must produce jobs that are long-term (in the sense of contributing to sustainability and/or regenerativity) and provide a living wage (wages and benefits); d) bolster rather than undermine local communities and cultures [and bioregions] and draw wisely from their cultural and biological diversity.” Culturally, this guideline means we “reject freedom unrestrained political market individualism and cultivate freedom as thriving in community, contributing both to individual (personal) well-being and the common good.”³³ Culturally it also means listening to the stories of earth and adopting some of the basic principles of ecological

³² This is principle # 7 of *The Earth Charter*.

³³ The sentences in parentheses are from a handout and presentation by Daniel Spencer and Cynthia Moe-Lobeda at an AAR session, November, 2007, San Diego.

design: namely, solutions grow from place, ecological accounting informs design, design should be done with nature, everyone is a designer, and nature should be made visible (i.e., we see the consequences, rather than flush and forget). Lastly, this guideline means, at least in sacramentalist perspective, a way of life committed to sufficiency as meeting the basic material needs of all life possible, now and for the future, and to material simplicity and spiritual richness as markers of the good life in human community.

I noted that this is only one illustration of working from only one deep tradition of the faith—sacramentalism. It joins many others: prophetic-liberative practices, the mystical and the ascetic, as well as the ways of wisdom, to contribute to the Great Work before us and do so as part of Christianity's ecological moment. All can be a taste of earth-honoring faith as Christianity's good work for the planet and a reminder that in the gifts from the ancestors, there is bread and water aplenty for the journey.

Coda. We are an Easter and Pentecost people who know that much of the Great Work will be a grind. The faith itself will be tested and changed. Yet the liturgical calendar has it right. There are fifty days of Easter and the triumph of life, compared with forty days of Lent and the valley of the shadow of death. That is, granted, a slim margin. But there is also Pentecost. So the upshot is that it is all tipped in the right direction: the triumph of life amidst, even out of, death. Green discipleship knows the end of the story.

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