

Creative **Transformation**

Volume 20 Numbers 1-2 ISSN 1062-4708

Winter/Spring 2011



Special Issue: A Theology of Enough

A Theology of Enough

Editorial	1
A Theology of Enough <i>by John B. Cobb, Jr.</i>	4
<i>Web of Debt</i> , an excerpt <i>by Ellen Brown</i>	7
Islam on Economic Justice and Usury <i>by Shams Ghonheim</i>	10
<i>Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key</i> an excerpt <i>by Larry Rasmussen</i>	12
Changing the Playing Field—Re-viewing Wealth <i>by Elizabeth Dodson Gray</i>	19

A Praxis of Enough

Seeds of Delight: A Spirituality of Gardening <i>by Steve Holt</i>	24
Practical Eco-Theology: Models and Resources to Transform Your Church <i>by Cassandra Carmichael</i>	28
Toward a Missional Understanding of Teen Consumerism <i>by Brian Kirk</i>	33
A Sermon <i>by Sallie McFague</i>	35
A Theology of Enough Time: The Important Message from Ecclesiastes for Today <i>by Brian Brandsmeier</i>	38
A Liturgy of Enough, Based on Psalm 23 <i>by Jeanyne B. Slettom</i>	6
A Process Hymn <i>by Sara Kay</i>	41
About the Artist: Paul Crimi	41
Critic's Corner: Books <i>Hope for Today's Families</i> , by James R. Jacobson <i>reviewed by Jeanyne B. Slettom</i>	42
<i>By the People, for the People</i> , by Franklin I. Gamwell <i>reviewed by Yi Shen</i>	43

Creative Transformation

exploring the growing edge of religious life

Volume 20.1-2 Winter/Spring 2011

Publisher and Editor

Jeanyne B. Slettom
Director, Process & Faith

Guest Editor

Brian Brandsmeier

Contributing Editors

Robert and Adrienne Brizee
Bruce G. Epperly
Patricia Adams Farmer
Ronald L. Farmer
Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore
Freddy Moreau
Paul S. Nancarrow

Editor 1991-2000

William A. Beardslee

Editor 2001-2009

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki

Cover Art

Lilies of the Field

[Paul Crimi](#)

Acrylic on canvas.

Used with permission.

Creative Transformation is published quarterly by Process & Faith. Process & Faith seeks ways for people interested in process thought to share ideas and resources, especially in local congregations.

To subscribe, join Process & Faith!

Basic membership: \$50

Students & Seniors: \$35

PROCESS & FAITH

Editor: Creative Transformation

1325 North College Avenue

Claremont, CA 91711-3199

909-447-2559

Fax: 909-621-2760

E-mail: office@processandfaith.org

Web site: www.processandfaith.org

Back issues and group rates
available.



Process & Faith EDITORIAL

This issue of Creative Transformation has a guest editor—Brian Brandsmeier. Brian is a graduate of Eden Seminary, a UCC pastor, and a creative worship leader who writes liturgies and [a blog](#) that I have enjoyed ever since I discovered it. Brian brings a process perspective to everything he does, so he was a natural to turn loose on our topic, “A Theology of Enough.” I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I’ve enjoyed seeing it come together.

*Yeah, the world was like an Amoco and I said “Fill er up!”
With a house, a car, a VCR, a lawn and all that stuff
But I got a nagging notion that enough did not exist
And at the end of every day I’d wonder “is this all there is?”
And someone said “Hey, you’ve already got ten times more than
the rest
And six-billion other people want the little that’s still left!”
But I snapped “It’s a free country and by rights it’s mine to keep
And by the way, who do I pay to take away this garbage heap?”
But I’m waking up, but I’m waking up
I’m waking up from the American Dream
~ “Waking Up” (excerpt) by Peter Mayer*

The American Dream—or what we’re told is the American Dream—is a nightmare for the Earth and her inhabitants. Climate change, emerging oligarchy, gross income inequality, “too-big-to-fail” banks, self-centered consumerism, and so on, wreak havoc in our shared home. As the events that led up to the housing market crash have reminded us, we truly live in an interdependent world. We live in the ecology of each other’s choices, actions, and morals. That fact could be our greatest downfall or greatest hope. Choosing the former option is easy; we just need to follow the status quo. But choosing the latter option is hard because it asks us all to change. It means placing all our bets on “hope” and “change.” Not just as political slogans but as legislative reality. Not just as good ideas but as wise actions. Not just as witty bumper stickers but as actual lifestyle alterations. These activities entail that we wake up from the American Dream and wake up to a “theology of enough.” And that is the focus of this edition of *Creative Transformation*.

In the first section, theologians from different perspectives explore various aspects of a “theology of enough.” John Cobb argues for a focus on collective/communal interests,

Ellen Brown provides historical context on monetary practices, Shams Ghonheim discusses the Islamic prohibition against usury, Larry Rasmussen describes ways to bring about needed transformation in our world, and Elizabeth Dodson Gray provides a re-definition of wealth/value.



In the second section, there are practical applications of a “theology of enough.” Steve Holt explores a spirituality of gardening and enjoying the earth, Cassandra Carmichael provides practical resources for congregations, Brian Kirk presents a way to help youth explore a missional understanding of personal economics, Sallie McFague provides a sermon that reflects on the kenosis needed in order for everyone to have a place at the global banquet, I present a sermon on Ecclesiastes that encourages a mindful appreciation of the limited time we have in this life, Jeanyne Slettom reviews a book about persuasive-relational parenting, and Yi Shen reviews a book about the intersection of politics and faith. Additionally, there are liturgical resources provided by Jeanyne Slettom and Sara Kay.

In these pages, we are invited to awaken to, embody, and enjoy a “theology of enough.”

a THEOLOGY of ENOUGH

by JOHN B. COBB, JR.



A theology of enough calls directly for personal decisions. I believe there are millions of us, perhaps tens of millions, who are quite sure we have enough of the things that money buys.

Those whose goals are other than wealth are often satisfied as long as their income enables them to pursue those goals. In some cases, those goals may be more and more fame or power, and then, they too need the message of “enough.” But in other cases the goals may be artistic achievement or service of the poor or world peace. We do not need to counsel moderation in these pursuits.

But even when many people recognize that they have enough of the world’s goods, and even when there are enough goods and services to satisfy the needs and even many of the wants of all the people in a region, the economy is typically built with the goal of growth. Its adequacy for the people it serves does not satisfy mainstream economic thinkers.

This can be illustrated in the case of the recent history of Japan. After decades of growth Japan’s economy leveled off. The wealth was distributed sufficiently that this did not lead to severe economic hardship in any large segment of the population. Japan remained an affluent nation. But Japan was held up before the world as an example of failure. It was not serving the god of growth.

The theology of enough directly opposes the god of growth. This does not mean that it opposes growth as such. Where there is not enough, growth is needed. But for the theology of enough, the goal of economic growth is to achieve a state in which everyone has enough. When there is enough, economic growth should cease. It should cease because economic growth is closely associated with increasing pressure on the already overstressed environment. Actually, the focus on improving the economy should then be on ways of insuring that everyone has enough while using less energy

and materials. We may also help people to redefine people’s wants in such a way that fewer goods are required to satisfy them. A “decline” in the economy as now measured might be a great success when it is viewed in this different way.

From the point of view of a theology of enough, standard methods of measuring growth are profoundly misleading. In the United States there has been a great deal of growth in the past half century, but people are less satisfied with their lives now than they were then. Changes adopted to promote economic growth have led to a decline of well being overall. Why, then, persist in seeking more and more of what demonstrably does not satisfy us? Yet the nations of the Earth all worship the god of economic growth—all but one.

The one nation that explicitly aims at a different goal is Bhutan. Its goal is not gross national product but gross national happiness. Rather than subordinating the wellbeing of the people to the economy, the Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan judges that the economy should contribute to the happiness of the people.

Mark Anielski has written a book entitled *The Economics of Happiness*. As long as the “science of economics” defines itself as the science of increasing economic activity, economists will pay little attention to this kind of thinking about the economy. But perhaps ordinary people will begin to ask their governments to support their efforts in the “pursuit of happiness” rather than pressure them to serve the economy.

What implications would this have for our economic actions today? It would certainly mean a great deal more theoretical work on a healthy steady-state economy. It could be celebrat-

ing the Japanese model and seeing how it might be copied. It would certainly change the nature of the discussion of our current financial and economic problems.

Today many agree that something should be done to respond to high unemployment and home foreclosures. But how is this problem formulated? The increasingly dominant libertarians, closely allied with neoliberal economists, want to leave the solving of economic problems to the minimally-regulated market, holding that such a market is bound to grow and produce the jobs and goods that are needed for all to prosper. Hence any government action other than reducing regulations and taxes and any other form of involvement in the economy is opposed.

Government retreat from education, health, and welfare leaves more and more people with much less than enough. Infrastructure continues to decay. But it is supposed that government should not spend more than it takes in and that taxes should be reduced as an incentive to more private investment in the market. This is seen as the way to increase market activity, that is, to grow.

Let us suppose that we as a people decided to aim at human well-being or happiness rather than at economic growth. We would then assess our shared needs and also those of the people who have been made jobless, homeless, and sometimes hungry as a result of recent financial crises as well as those whose poverty has a much longer history. How can we meet these critical needs?

Consider a simple and obvious step in reducing the problem. On the one hand, a great deal of work is needed to improve our national infrastructure. On the other hand, there are many people who have no jobs but who have skills that they could employ in this process. If they are paid well for their work, they will again be able to afford homes for their families.

What is the argument against governments employing people to do this needed work? The objection is that it will cost the government money. It is assumed that paying the bills will require either raising taxes or increasing the already bloated debt that we leave for our children to pay. Instead we should leave it to the market to work its magic. But is this true?

To answer, we have to consider the nature of money and especially how money is created. Of course we know that some money is created physically in the form of coins and

paper money, but that is a very small part of the money supply. Most of the money consists in credit issued by banks. Ultimately the Federal Reserve creates money by giving credit to banks. It did so recently to the tune of trillions of dollars. There is no limit to how much it can create. The only question is whether the way it creates it leads to inflation. Rescuing the financial institutions did not have this effect.

The use of the term “federal” in the title, Federal Reserve, leads many to suppose that it is an agency of the United States government, and in fact it serves as the nation’s central bank. The government does have some participation in its governance. However, it belongs to privately owned banks and exists primarily to serve them.

Central banks can also be owned by governments. If the U.S. government made the Federal Reserve a part of the U.S. treasury department, it could issue money to pay off the federal debt. Whether this would be wise is another matter, but those who worry about the debt should learn that it would not be difficult to pay it off. Dennis Kucinich has introduced legislation into Congress that would do this among other things.

If the United States nationalized its central bank it could directly pay for now unemployed workers to rebuild the nation’s infrastructure. This would require neither borrowing nor taxes. More taxes would be needed only in the unlikely event that these governmental expenditures proved inflationary. Taxes could then remove the excess money supply.

Taxes can also be used to redistribute wealth. If the nation’s policy was to work for the meeting of the needs of all without



continuing to increase the production that so stresses the environment, there would be no problem in heavily taxing the very rich. The argument that this would reduce their capacity to invest in new businesses and expansion of old ones would not carry much weight, since the growth they claim to stimulate would not be the aim.

The national government could also bail out states as the Federal Reserve bailed out banks. Alternatively, states could create their own banks along the lines of the one that North Dakota already has. A dozen states are now considering doing this. States could use their banks to make loans to persons and organizations that showed promise of benefiting the people of the state, especially the poor.

Public ignorance of the great advantage of governments owning their own banks is probably not entirely an accident. Private financial institutions have profited immensely from controlling the finances of nations. They continue to do so, and the wealth they have amassed in recent years is vast indeed. Controlling the nation's central bank allows them to take huge risks with the assurance that their losses will be covered. This is the system obeying the maxim "privatize profits and socialize losses." If the Federal Reserve were part of the government, the enormous profits that have gone to Wall Street would be shared with the people of the country. That this is not taught in our schools gives the lie to our supposed freedom of thought and speech. Since leading economics journals look to the Federal Reserve for funding, it may be no accident that economists publish so little on the subject of money.



There is no guarantee that even if governments owned their central banks, they would use their increased control over finance well. The Bank of Canada years ago funded the newly established social services, including national medical care, but private banks succeeded in changing government policy, thus returning most money creation to their hands. Today most Canadians do not know why Canada has such difficulty financing its welfare system, and conservatives are threatening to gut it.

There is certainly no guarantee that governments would use their control of finance to implement an economics of enough. They might be more likely to use it to promote endless growth. There is, however, virtual certainty that the private banks will not help us move in the direction that is required for the health of the planet. The costs they impose upon government and through it upon all the people work against any advance in that direction. It is time that we reasserted our collective interests against those of great wealth who have transformed this nation into a plutocracy. We will still have the second task of developing economies of enough, but with public control of finance we *can* meet the needs of all without endless growth.

a liturgy of ENOUGH based on Psalm 23

by JEANYNE B. SLETTOM

The Lord is our shepherd; we have all that we need.

**God created the green fields of this Earth,
Life-giving waters and pure, clean air.**

The Lord is our shepherd; we follow where God leads.

**But Earth itself needs reviving,
And we are called as stewards to its care.**

The Earth is God's table; everyone is called to the feast.

**We see there are enough resources for all,
When distribution is equitable and fair.**

The goodness and mercy of God fill all of creation.

**For God created this planet as our home;
It is for us to enjoy, but also to share.**

WEB OF DEBT: an excerpt

From Matriarchies of Abundance to Patriarchies of Debt

by ELLEN BROWN



“I’m melting! My world! My world! Who would have thought a little girl like you could destroy my beautiful wickedness!”

When Frank Baum made his witch-vanquishing hero a defenseless young girl, he probably wasn’t thinking about the gender ramifications of economic systems; but Bernard Lietaer has given the subject serious thought. In *The Mystery of Money*, he traces the development of two competing monetary schemes, one based on shared abundance, the other based on scarcity, greed and debt. The former characterized the matriarchal societies of antiquity. The latter characterized the warlike patriarchal societies that forcibly displaced them.

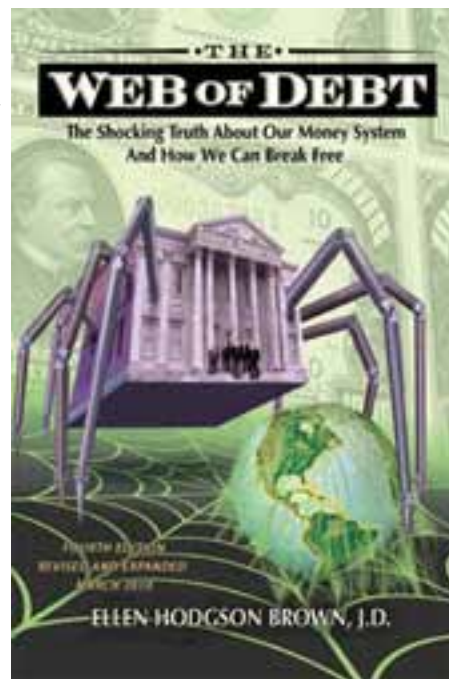
The issue wasn’t really one of gender, of course, since every society is composed half of each. The struggle was between two archetypal world views. What Lietaer called the matriarchal and patriarchal systems, Henry Clay called the American and British systems—cooperative abundance versus competitive greed. But that classification isn’t really accurate either, or fair to the British people, since their own economic conquerors also came from somewhere else, and the British succeeded in withstanding the money-lenders’ advances for hundreds of years. The “American system” devised in the American colonies was actually foreshadowed in the tally system of medieval England. Lietaer traces this archetypal struggle back much farther than seventeenth century England. He traces it to the cradle of Western civilization in ancient Sumer.

When Money Could Grow

Located where Iraq is today, Sumer was a matriarchal agrarian economy with a financial system based on abundance and shared wealth. One of the oldest known bronze coins was the Sumerian shekel, dating from 3,200 B.C. It was inscribed with the likeness of the Goddess Inanna-Ishtar, who bestowed kingship in Sumer and was the goddess of fertility, life and

death. Inanna wore the horns of a cow, the sacred animal that personified the Great Mother everywhere in ancient myth. Hathor, the Egyptian equivalent, had cow ears and a human face and was the goddess of love, fertility and abundance. Her horn was the “cornucopia” from which poured the earth’s plenty. Isis, an even more powerful Egyptian mother figure, was portrayed wearing the horns of a cow with the sun disc between them. In India, the cow goddess was Kali, for whom cows are sacred to this day. Cows were also associated with money, since they were an early medium of exchange. The Sumerian word for “interest” was the same as the word for “calf.” It was natural to repay advances of cattle with an extra calf, because the unit of exchange itself multiplied over the loan period. This was also true for grain, for which the temples served as storehouses. Grain advanced over the growing period was repaid with extra grain after the harvest, in gratitude to God for multiplying the community’s abundance.

The temples were public institutions that also served welfare functions, including the support of widows, orphans, the elderly and infirm. Temples were endowed with land to provide food for their dependent labor, and resources such as herds of sheep to provide wool for their workshops. They operated autonomously, supporting themselves not through taxation but by renting lands and workshops and charging interest on loans. Goods were advanced to traders, who returned the value of the goods plus interest. The temples also acted as central banks. Sacrificial coins inscribed “debt to the Gods” were paid to farmers in acknowledgment that wheat had been contributed to the temple. These coins were also lent to borrowers. When interest was paid on the loans, it went back to the temple to



fund the community's economic and social programs and to cover losses from bad loans.

It was only after the Indo-European invasions of the second millennium B.C. that moneylending became the private enterprise of the infamous moneychangers. The Goddess Inanna was superseded as the source of supreme kingship by the male god Enlil of Nippur, and the matriarchal system of shared communal abundance was forcibly displaced by a militant patriarchal system. The cornucopia of the Horned Goddess became the bull horns of the Thunder God, representing masculine power, virility and force.

In the temple system, the community extended credit and received the money back with interest. In the system that displaced it, interest on debts went into private vaults to build the private fortunes of the moneychangers. Interest was thus transformed from a source of income for the community into a tool for impoverishing and enslaving people and nations. Unlike corn and cows, the gold the moneylenders lent was inorganic. It did not "grow," so there was never enough to cover the additional interest charges added to loans. When there was insufficient money in circulation to cover operating expenses, farmers had to borrow until harvest time; and the odd man out in the musical chairs of finding eleven coins to repay ten wound up in debtor's prison. Historically, most slavery originated from debt.¹

The Proscription Against Usury

"Usury" is now defined as charging "excess" interest, but originally it meant merely charging a fee or interest for the use of money. Usury was forbidden in the Christian Bible, and anti-usury laws were strictly enforced by the Catholic Church until the end of the Middle Ages. But in Jewish scriptures, which were later joined to the Christian books as the "Old Testament," usury was forbidden only between "brothers." Charging interest to foreigners was allowed and even encouraged. The "moneychangers" thus came to be associated with the Jews, but they were not actually the Jewish people. In fact the Jewish people may have suffered more than any other people from the moneychangers' schemes, which were responsible for much anti-semitism.

In the informative documentary video *The Money Masters*, Bill Still and Patrick Carmack point out that when Jesus threw the moneychangers out of the temple, it was actually to protect the Jewish people. Half-shekels, the only pure silver coins of assured weight without the image of a pagan Emperor on them, were the only coins considered acceptable for paying the Temple tax, a tribute to God. But half-shekels were scarce, and the moneychangers had cornered the market for them. Like the modern banking cartel, they had monopolized the medium of

exchange and were exacting a charge for its use.

Despite the injunctions in the New Testament, there were times when the king needed money. In the Middle Ages, England was short of gold, which had left during the Crusades. In 1087, when King William (Rufus) needed gold to do business with the French, he therefore admitted the moneylenders, on condition that the interest be demanded in gold and that half be paid to the king. But the moneylenders eventually became so wealthy at the expense of the people that the Church, with urgings from the Pope, prohibited them from taking interest; and in 1290, when they had lost their usefulness to the king, most Jews were again expelled from the country. This pattern, in which Jews as a people have been persecuted for the profiteering of a few and have been used as scapegoats to divert attention from the activities of the rulers, has been repeated over the centuries.

Money as a Simple Tally of Accounts

Meanwhile, England was faced with the problem of what to use for money when the country was short of gold. The coinage system was commodity-based. It assumed that "money" was something having value in itself (gold or silver), which was bartered or traded for goods or services of equal value. But according to Stephen Zarlenga, who has traced the origins and history of money in his revealing compendium *The Lost Science of Money*, the use of coins as money did not originate with merchants trading in the marketplace. The first known coins were issued by governments; and their value was the value stamped on them, not the price at which the metal traded. Zarlenga quotes Aristotle, who said:

Money exists not by nature but by law. [It acts] as a measure [that] makes goods commensurate and equates them. . . . There must then be a unit, and that fixed by agreement.

Money was a mere *fiat* of the law. *Fiat* means "let it be done" in Latin. "Fiat money" is money that is legal tender by government decree. It is simply a "tally," something representing units of value that can be traded in the market, a receipt for goods or services that can legally be tendered for other goods or services. In Mandarin China, where paper money was invented in the ninth century, this sort of *fiat* currency funded a long and prosperous empire. Fiat money was also used successfully in medieval England, but in England it was made of wood.

The English tally system originated with King Henry I, son of William the Conqueror, who took the throne in 1100 A.D. The printing press had not yet been invented, and taxes were paid directly with goods produced by the land. Under King Henry's innovative system, payment was recorded with a piece of wood

that had been notched and split in half. One half was kept by the government and the other by the recipient. To confirm payment, the two halves were matched to make sure they “tallied.” Since no stick splits in an even manner, and since the notches tallying the sums were cut right through both pieces of wood, the method was virtually foolproof against forgery. The tally system has been called the earliest form of bookkeeping. According to historian M. T. Clanchy in *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*:

Tallies were . . . a sophisticated and practical record of numbers. They were more convenient to keep and store than parchments, less complex to make, and no easier to forge.

Only a few hundred tallies survive, Clanchy writes, but millions were made. Tallies were used by the government not only as receipts for the payment of taxes but to pay soldiers for their service, farmers for their wheat, and laborers for their labor. At tax time, the treasurer accepted the tallies in payment of taxes. By the thirteenth century, the financial market for tallies was sufficiently sophisticated that they could be bought, sold, or discounted. Tallies were used by individuals and institutions to register debts, record fines, collect rents, and enter payments for services rendered. In the 1500s, King Henry VIII gave them the force of a national currency when he ordered that tallies *must* be used to evidence the payment of taxes. That meant everyone had to have them. In *War Cycles, Peace Cycles*, Richard Hoskins writes that by the end of the seventeenth century, about 14 million pounds’ worth of tally-money was in circulation. Zarlenga cites a historian named Spufford, who said that English coinage had never exceeded half a million pounds up to that time. The tally system was thus not a minor monetary experiment, as some commentators have suggested. During most of the Middle Ages, tallies may have made up the bulk of the English money supply. The tally system was in use for more than five centuries before the usury bankers’ gold-based paper banknotes took root, helping to fund a long era of leisure and abundance that flowered into the Renaissance.

A Revisionist View of the Middle Ages

Modern schoolbooks generally portray the Middle Ages as a time of poverty, backwardness, and economic slavery, from which the people were freed only by the Industrial Revolution; but reliable early historians painted a quite different picture. Thorold Rogers, a nineteenth century Oxford historian, wrote that in the Middle Ages, “a labourer could provide all the necessities for his family for a year by working 14 weeks.” Fourteen weeks is only a quarter of a year! The rest of the time, some men worked for themselves; some studied; some fished. Some

helped to build the cathedrals that appeared all over Germany, France and England during the period, massive works of art that were built mainly with volunteer labor. Some used their leisure to visit these shrines. One hundred thousand pilgrims had the wealth and leisure to visit Canterbury and other shrines yearly. William Cobbett, author of the definitive *History of the Reformation*, wrote that Winchester Cathedral “was made when there were no poor rates; when every labouring man in England was clothed in good woollen cloth; and when all had plenty of meat and bread . . .” Money was available for inventions and art, supporting the Michelangelos, Rembrandts, Shakespeares, and Newtons of the period.

The Renaissance is usually thought of as the flowering of the age; but the university system, representative government in a Parliament, the English common law system, and the foundations of a great literary and spiritual movement were all in place by the thirteenth century, and education was advanced and widespread. As one scholar of the era observes:

We are very prone to consider that it is only in our time that anything like popular education has come into existence. As a matter of fact, however, the education afforded to the people in the little towns of the Middle Ages, represents an ideal of educational uplift for the masses such as has never been even distantly approached in succeeding centuries. The Thirteenth Century developed the greatest set of technical schools that the world has ever known. . . . These medieval towns, . . . during the course of the building of their cathedrals, of their public buildings and various magnificent edifices of royalty and for the nobility, succeeded in accomplishing such artistic results that the world has ever since held them in admiration.

The common people had leisure, education, art, and economic security. According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*:

Economic historians like Rogers and Gibbins declare that during the best period of the Middle Ages—say, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, inclusive—there was no such grinding and hopeless poverty, no such chronic semi-starvation in any class, as exists to-day among large classes in the great cities . . . In the Middle Ages there was no class resembling our proletariat, which has no security, no definite place, no certain claim upon any organization or institution in the socio-economic organism.

Richard Hoskins attributes this long period of prosperity to the

Brown, continued on page 40



Islam on economic JUSTICE and USURY

by SHAMS GHONEIM,BS.,MS

Accepting Islam means accepting a social code that calls for assuming certain responsibilities, two of which are social justice in and mercy. Looking at society as one cohesive whole is at the core of Islamic teachings and values. The principle of equality in Islam and in the legal justice system is of distributive justice. While legal justice calls for equal rights for all, distributive justice is directed towards the poor, the most vulnerable, and orphans. There are certain institutions in Islam that support distributive justice mainly through almsgiving (Zakat), the third pillar of Islam, and Alwakaf, which are religious endowments supporting schools, hospitals, the poor, and wayfarers. Giving to the poor is not only via material sustenance, but also through the brotherly system where citizens share what they have with newcomers and others. This was best demonstrated during the Prophet's time in Medina when he and his followers emigrated there from Mecca and had to leave their families and all their belongings behind. They lacked emotional, mental, and material support. Each Medinian was brothered with a Meccan.

In early Arabia, due to high mortality caused by diseases and warfare, orphans also lacked a support system. Many verses in the Qur'an command the care of orphans and warn of severe punishments of any one taking advantage of them. The Prophet himself was orphaned when he was 6 years old and was raised first by his grandfather then after his death by his uncle.

In Qur'an: 93:9 "Therefore, the orphan shalt thou never wrong, and him that seeks [thy] help shalt thou never chide, and of thy Sustainer's blessings shalt thou [ever] speak."

107:1 HAST THOU ever considered [the kind of man] who gives the lie to all moral law? Behold, it is this [kind of man] that thrusts the orphan, and feels no urge to feed the need, Woe, then, unto those praying ones, whose hearts from their prayer are remote, those who want only to be seen and praised, and, withal, deny all assistance [to their fellow-men]!

In every society there are two pools of people: the borrowers and the savers. The two can be connected through shared own-

ership and shared risks. Shared ownership can be via equity financing or loans /debt financing.

The subject of usury or Riba is one of the most difficult subjects for many Muslim scholars. Usury or riba are meant to prohibit inequality among various elements of society. Riba is a system by which one person/entity makes money effortlessly through the exploitation of another.

The Qur'an discusses this issue: 30:39 "And [remember:] whatever you may give out in usury so that it might increase through [other] people's possessions will bring [you] no increase in the sight of God whereas all that you give out in charity, seeking God's countenance, [will be blessed by Him:] for it is they, [who thus seek His countenance] that shall have their recompense multiplied!"

The above verse is the earliest mention of the term and concept of riba in the chronology of Quranic revelation. In its general, linguistic sense, this term denotes an "addition" to or an "increase" of anything over and above its original size, value, or amount. In the terminology of the Qur'an, it signifies any unlawful addition, by way of interest, to a sum of money or goods lent by one person or body of persons to another. This term occurs for the first time in the chronological order of revelation. The passage prohibiting riba, which follows here, is believed to have been among the last revelations received by the Prophet who died few days later. The subject of usury connects logically with the preceding long passage on the subject of charity because the former is morally the exact opposite of the latter. True charity consists in giving without an expectation of material gain, whereas usury is based on an expectation of gain without any corresponding effort on the part of the lender.

Islamic scholars have not yet been able to reach an absolute agreement on the definition of riba: a definition, that is, which would cover all conceivable legal situations and positively respond to all the exigencies of a variable economic environment.

The following Qur'anic verses address usury:

2:275: THOSE who gorge themselves on Usury behave but as he might behave whom Satan has confounded with his touch; for they say, “Buying and selling is but a kind of Usury”—the while God has made buying and selling lawful and Usury unlawful. Hence, whoever becomes aware of his Sustainer’s admonition, and thereupon desists [from Usury], may keep his past gains, and it will be for God to judge him; but as for those who return to it -they are destined for the fire, therein to abide!

2:276: God deprives usurious gains of all blessing, whereas He blesses charitable deeds with manifold increase. And God does not love anyone who is stubbornly ingrate and persists in sinful ways.

2:278: O you who have attained to faith! Remain conscious of God. and give up all outstanding gains from Usury, if you are [truly] believers.

3:130 O YOU who have attained to faith! Do not gorge yourselves on Usury, doubling and re-doubling it- but remain conscious of God, so that you might attain to a happy state;

4:161: and [for] their taking Usury although it had been forbidden to them, and their wrongful devouring of other people’s possessions. And for those from among them who [continue to] deny the truth We have readied grievous suffering.

The Qur’an does not specify the ideal type of economic system. It prescribes the means by which available resources are to be shared to achieve justice. The Qur’an does not also mandate equity financing verses debt financing. It allows transactions that are mutually beneficial. God has created the world with many different resources and humans have the capability to decide how justly and ethically to use them. The Qur’an does not exactly define what constitute riba. Some scholars believe that all interest is prohibited while others believe that there are varying degrees of prohibition.

However most Muslim Jurists believe that all debt financing is illegal in Islam and this has led to the creation of Islamic banking, which allegedly relies only on equity financing and without accumulating interest. The fact is that it is pretty much the same system and charges interest but with a different twist. The exception is when these banks offer loans without interest by taking part in ownership of the ventures of their borrowers while sharing both risks and profits. But when there is a default on such loans both bank and borrowers lose. The effect of in-

flation on such transactions is another important factor as it shrinks the value of the borrowed funds.

The late well-known American Muslim scholar Dr. Fathi Osman was

of the opinion that accepting a fair mortgage agreement in a Non Muslim Society is up to each Muslim and according to his/her need. In Islam, everyone needs work, social security, a home, food, and clothing. Dr. Osman believes that loans need to be without interest. Paying a very high interest of 3 times or more the value of a house is unfair practice. In an Islamic State such loans are to be offered to Muslims according to need and necessity via the public treasury maintained by Zakat, Awkaf, and charities. But in the absence of other alternatives to purchase a house, taking a traditional loan becomes the only available choice. Islamic law dictates that loans are to be a partnership and according to necessity with both sides taking equal risks.

In today’s society credit is indispensable to economic global activity. Historically two major credit crunches occurred. The 1930s US depression and the 1990s collapse of the Japanese economy. Both were associated with very low interest of less than 1% in the Japanese case. So interest may not be directly responsible for major global financial crises.

Dr. Maher Hathout in his book, *In Pursuit of Justice*, writes that a common misconception is that all forms of interest are equally prohibited since the Qur’an prohibits usury. However he argues that excessive and exploitive forms of interest fall within usury. On the other hand interest taking into account appropriate risks is not outlawed.

In conclusion more study by Muslim scholars of this critical issue of our times is needed. The main goal must be securing social/economic justice and according to each individual journey towards God and faith.

SHAMS GHONEIM is an Egyptian American Muslim and 44-year Iowa resident. She is coordinator of the Iowa Chapter of the Muslim Public Affairs Council and former national board member. She is on the Executive Committee of the Iowa City Eman Islamic Center, former EXC member of the Mother Mosque of America, and former president of the Johnson County Consultation of Religious Communities. She has been involved in interfaith dialogue for 10 years.

The Qur’an does not specify the ideal type of economic system. It prescribes the means by which available resources are to be shared to achieve justice.

Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious ETHICS IN A NEW KEY

an excerpt from his new book by LARRY RASMUSSEN

What is the subject of ethics? What are its essential concepts and traditions? If we are born to morality, predisposed as social creatures for life together, are we also born with morality? Are there recurring moral patterns across cultures? How are they sustained and changed, as need arises?

These are broad questions with generic answers, human species answers. While meaningful and important, they fade to irrelevance if they are not also concrete and contextual: What are the stipulations for a viable ethic *now*, in view of the world we have and the creature we are? How do we take responsibility for the human power we presently possess? What does religious ethics contribute? What moral issues and substance belong to doing first works over at a hinge time in history? What ethic understands our reality, not as an “environmental crisis” or an “economic crisis” or a “climate crisis,” or a crisis of world order, but all of them braided as a civilizational challenge in a time of transition to a different way of life?

These questions . . . are framed with attention to the kind and levels of change required of us, as sketched by Havel and alluded to by Darwin. The task is to become a viable species, not as the most intelligent or strongest, but the most capable of the right kind of change. The Ethic We Need stands in the service of that change.

The kinds and levels of change are three-fold. The first is the first that occurs to us and the easiest to pursue. Namely, do better what we already know so as to continue, on familiar terms, the life we’ve achieved. No one wants to white out the benefits modernity has delivered—longer life, better health, abundance and a greater range of choice and experience. Furthermore, we know what to do to keep these. Wring great efficiencies from present sources of energy and use of water. Reward technological innovation and economies of scale in the market place so as to replace combustion engines with electric motors and heavy gas users with hybrids. Flip the switch on sources of electricity so that roof panels directly overhead on thousands of homes, businesses, schools, churches and temples idle the coal-fired



generator a hundred miles away. Replace the produce hauled a thousand miles at high energy and clean air cost with locally grown food that gives small farmers a chance and circulates cash in the community several times over, to the benefit of all. And treat material goods in ways that routinely reuse, recycle, and renew. All this is genuine change, accomplished for the sake of holding on to what we cherish.

Such change as this can turn counter-productive, however. At some point it usually does. When the institutions, systems, and basic perspectives of a whole way of life are firmly in place as the common sense manner of daily life, interests often narrow to “improved means for unimproved ends”¹ (Thoreau) and little more. An ultimately unsustainable way of life is “improved” for a few more years. This delays a necessary reckoning about its unimproved ends. Still, such reckoning does happen—at the next level of change.

The next kind and level belongs to the shock of recognition discussed earlier.

It dawns on us, perhaps gradually, perhaps in an epiphany moment, that a waning era’s need is a paradigm shift. Conventional means turn dysfunctional; doing the accustomed only makes matters worse as it is done more “efficiently.” We may slow the rate of CO₂ emissions with green technologies. Yet greenhouse gas accumulation grows, the global mean temperature climbs another degree or two, climate change accelerates and its extremes affect growing seasons and crops, pest infestation and disease, human health and coastal infrastructure, species and their habitats. Water usage per person drops significantly and so does agricultural use per acre as conservation wends its way from sea to shining sea. Yet total water use for a steadily growing global population and the shift to more meat diets

among growing middle classes in Asia and South America not only cancels all gains but leaves too little freshwater for both human beings and the rest of life. In short, even leveling out and extending the (greening) trends at 2000 spells apocalypse.

A famous paradox surfaces here. In 1865 William Stanley Jevons published *The Coal Question*. He said England's turn to coal couldn't last despite then-abundant sources, even with increased efficiency. He argued in italics that “[i]t is wholly a confusion of ideas to suppose that the economical use of fuel is equivalent to a diminished consumption. The very contrary is the truth.”² Sure enough, the time since 1865 has borne out Jevons with a vengeance. Increased efficiencies have accompanied and contributed to extra economic growth that has outstripped the more “economical use of fuel.” The economic growth made possible exceeded the per unit saved energy so dramatically that total energy use scaled up markedly. Recall our drafts for the period of 1950 following, a time of much innovation and marked efficiencies in production, distribution, and consumption, including recycling.

Jevons' paradox might not have held had the industrial paradigm been abandoned for another. But it was not. So Jevons assumed, rightly, that continuing economic growth was the framework and the goal, and that efficiencies would play out within this framework and with this goal. Now, however, efficiencies within that same framework exacerbate its dysfunctions. They are “improved means to unimproved ends” (Thoreau). Marked efficiencies accompanying greatly expanded energy use generates climate change.

In short, the realization dawns, with or without knowledge of Jevons' paradox, that some new first works are required. Editing the old ones is not sufficient revision. New wineskins and new cloth are needed. The “old is [not] good.”³ “Nothing succeeds like success” morphs to “nothing fails like success” as success breeds excess and becomes a nemesis. Because climate change, for example, is the byproduct of everyday activities, continued routine lands us in a flooded ditch.

Roger Shinn, using William James, calls this second-level change a “forced option.” Some options are avoidable. You can take 'em or leave 'em, change your way of life or carry on as before. Up to you. Other options are forced because decisions for something different cannot be avoided or evaded. This doesn't dictate only a single course of action, with fate crouching at the door. The choices are still many. But the *status quo* extended is not among them. Human freedom will be exercised in other ways for other ends.⁴

This is difficult, this transition from doing better what we already do well to doing something quite other because “well”

is no longer viable and options are forced. The transition is a blow to tried, tested and improved ways. After all, we know how to build big dams, irrigate millions of acres of industrial farmland, keep crop production high with massive amounts of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, and launch fleets of eighteen wheelers to stock supermarkets the size of football fields with more edibles and drinkables than the world has ever seen.

The transition is also difficult because it entails, per Havel, the collapse of “consistent value systems.” Value systems are “consistent” because they belong to the tight logic of the successful industrial-technological paradigm. They seem the only “reasonable” course. Why not use abundant, cheap coal, for example, instead of leaving it at home in the mountain? Why not substitute natural gas for soil (ammonia as fertilizer) and oil and heavy machinery for farmers? Why not continued economic growth and “a rising tide that lifts all boats” (John

Some options are avoidable. You can take 'em or leave 'em, change your way of life or carry on as before. . . . Other options are forced because decisions for something different cannot be avoided or evaded. This doesn't dictate only a single course of action . . . The choices are still many. But the status quo extended is not among them.

F. Kennedy)? We value a high energy, fossil-fueled life style, so why not find ways to continue it?

Or take a different example of the conventional wisdom extended, the marriage of democracy to capitalism. Its entrepreneurial drive and short-haul, restricted time horizons (this election cycle, these quarterly profits) has been wildly successful for millions, as has been the ensuing economic growth. Yet “growing the economy” with no end in sight and democratic capitalist values fail to serve either present or future populations of nature on a contracting planet in desperate need of long time horizons and generational staying power. And what about the externalities that let democratic capitalist systems generate

unprecedented wealth at the expense of huge ecological debt? They have to be internalized or life systems will continue to decline at an accelerating rate. Capitalism cannot be a free rider system any more than state socialism, with nature bearing the costs of both. Yet getting the price right so as to include all costs, including those of nature's regeneration, requires other values, other interests, different policies, and other market mechanisms. If economic growth is the mantra, it can only be growth congruent with nature's renewal, demands, and limits.

The collapse of prized, consistent value systems in times between times does not render us bereft. Not only are there creative technological solutions to some of the problems, there are also the treasures of cultures present and past, "distant in time and space." "A mixing and blending of cultures," to recall Havel, "and a plurality or parallelism of intellectual and spiritual worlds" takes up the work of negotiating hard transitions. This includes cultures we know from the inside. While they are not children left behind, neither do they remain the same. The key, we noted, is change that expands their capacity to be more inclusive and creative in searching for a new integrity "anchored in the Earth and the universe" and "honoring imperatives derived from respect for the miracle of Being, the miracle of the universe, the miracle of nature, the miracle of our own existence." (Havel)

All this said, the kind of change that follows from now-dysfunctional ways of life is what Havel experienced, a world that "seems disconnected, confusing, chaotic, with few integrating forces, common meanings, or inner understanding of the phenomena we experience."⁵ It is a world in decline, even collapse. Or at least it seems so until jarring recognition moves to a third level and kind of change. Here the need for new first works is accompanied by a change of consciousness and cosmology that lets systemic change happen and guides it. This is "new meaning . . . gradually born from the encounter, or the intersection, of many different elements." (Havel) It is a different place to stand, with different optics and a different view of what does and does not make sense. It is transformed values and cultures, a new wisdom. New songs in a strange land, if you will, and different wineskins. Or different cornerstones and new architecture. "Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.'?" (Matthew 21:42a, Jesus citing Psalm 118:22)

The rejected stone or the new wine might, for example, be so simple and powerful as the realization, noted earlier, that planetary health is primary and human well-being derivative. That could in turn mean an expanded moral universe in which the present anthropocentric master-slave ethic governing our use of nature is abandoned and policies of production, dis-

tribution and consumption of food, energy, and water are as integrally related to one another as the systems of nature that provide them. Further, that the regenerative needs of soil, air, energy, and water are accounted for and factored into every use of these, including the price of consumer goods. Human "technologies would then be coherent with the technologies of the natural world"⁶ and in accord with the proper first law of economics; namely, "the preservation of the Earth economy."⁸

Or perhaps changes of consciousness and cosmology would lead to deconstructing structures that, like present food and energy systems, are too big to fail (i.e., to exist), in favor of smaller systems, closer to home, with more transparency, more face-to-face accountability, more care for local nature and more flexibility, with wider margins of error during a season of climate-driven experimentation and adaptation. This is awareness that in a chaotic world decentralized systems are much less dangerous than centralized ones. When they fail, as some no doubt will, they yield less damage overall and are far easier to correct. (Is it wise to have only five basic food crops, each gene-engineered for the same results everywhere in a climate changing world, when there are no heat-resistant genes?)

Changes at the level of consciousness and cosmology might also extend human rights so as to include, in some meaningful way, the lives of other animals, with implications for factory farming, diets, and the preservation of species. The vision and values of the [Earth Charter](#), fashioned and adopted by millions around the world, might inform constitutions and legislation. The ordering of those values is not accidental. Of the Charter's four major sections, the first two—I. Respect and Care for the Community of Life, and II. Ecological Integrity—lead into the next—III. Social and Economic Justice, and IV. Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace.

In short, examples are almost unlimited when fossil-fuel fundamentalism is rejected as a way of life and change happens at the level of worldviews that generate a different angle of basic perception. Basic ideas and values are deeply altered by such changes in consciousness and cosmology. "Do not be conformed to this world," is Paul's language, "but be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

This perspectival revolution (renewed minds) is in keeping with the kind of creature we are. For creatures of symbolic consciousness, it is mind, ideas and values together with the reigning story or life narrative that matter most profoundly when re-beginning is a different Great Work. Something near the core of what makes us human, namely our creative powers

of imagination, meaning, and choice, are engaged when the forced option is some expansive alternative.

In addition to levels and kinds of change, there is a *dialectic* of change that commands attention. Two axioms make this easy to remember. The first is: “what people define as real is real in its consequences.” People act in accord with their perception of what is happening. How they respond is in keeping with how they interpret what they see. This highlights the importance of hearts and minds for effective change. “Hearts and minds” describes the role personal character and cosmology play in determining people’s conduct. Internalized values, virtues, and ways of “reading” the world select, as it were, among the actions we might take. They favor those most in accord with who we are. “What people define as real is real in its consequences” is thus a clue to what prospective change will take hold. It will be change that either already accords with hearts and minds or that changes them.

An important counter-truth is captured in the second axiom. Namely, “behavioral changes frequently precede attitudinal ones.” We act our way, as it were, into new ways of seeing and thinking via changed practices. Some of these practices may be mandated, even coerced—the law of the land, the stipulations of the job, the requirements of a contract or covenant, the begrudging compromise that keeps all parties at the table, the terms of a treaty, the expectations of someone we dare not disappoint. Structure, systems, institutions and policies all mandate behavior, they all stipulate actions we might not undertake if these were left to the musings of the soul or the spontaneities of the heart. Yet, by shaping our behavior from the outside, so to speak, they effect changes in the way we live. They generate new routines to live by, and in due course different values take hold. When President Truman integrated the armed forces of the U. S. in 1948, and black and white soldiers trained together, lived, ate and fought together, the race-related attitudes of both groups changed. Those attitudes were different from the attitudes of the very same soldiers when those soldiers trained, lived, and fought in race-segregated units. Different practices, themselves compelled, effected a different relationship and altered values.

Another example: Martin Luther King’s breaking the law and risking jail in the civil rights struggle, and his plea for others to do so, wasn’t only the moral witness of non-compliance with evil. It was pressure on the nation to enact and enforce

different laws so that a racist nation didn’t have to wait until racism was eradicated from each heart, mind, and soul before justice could be done for the disenfranchised. Different laws would diminish the public impact of racism and eventually affect attitudes themselves.

Or yet quite a different example. Derrick Jensen’s article, “Forget Shorter Showers: Why personal change does not equal political change,” may overstate the point.⁸ But he is

Prophetic symbols and practices, even modest ones, move people in a direction that lets them embrace, rather than fight, bigger changes when the moment is ripe and options are forced.

right that short of changing the fundamentals of the corporate economy and how it uses water, short of changing laws, institutions, and our collective mind-set, the individualist, voluntary focus on what-you-can-do-to-save-the-planet is an exercise in futility. In Bill McKibben’s language, “addition” will not save the day—thousands of individual showers with

an egg timer. Only “multiplication” will and multiplication is far more than individual voluntary steps. “Screw in a new light bulb? Sure,” says McKibben, only to go on to say, “Screw in a new global treaty? Now we’re talking.”⁹ Treaties mean multiplication, multiplication that works whether we are among the conscientious or the complacent.

Yet Jensen’s polemic against individual hearts-and-minds change has forgotten the first axiom. So we must loop back to say that change undertaken by individuals who simply find it the right thing to do—those shorter showers, with or without egg timers—does matter. In the larger scheme of things, that undertaking may be no more than so-called “symbolic” action, action that sends an important signal even if, of itself, it doesn’t unload widespread change. Jensen fails to see that prophetic symbols and practices, even modest ones, move people in a direction that lets them embrace, rather than fight, bigger changes when the moment is ripe and options are forced. Small changes are often the leaven of a better order. They are like water softening up compacted soil, allowing new seeds to grow.

Climate change affords the same point. Hoisting solar panels to rooftops here and there, starting a community garden, and reforesting a flood plain, one community at a time, will not do what only bioregional, national, and international legislation and law enforcement can. Beijing, Canberra, Washington, Brasilia, Brussels, Delhi, Moscow, and the UN are the places that most count for this, rather than my neighborhood. Yet, “there’s no such thing as a useless community garden,”¹⁰ a useless photovoltaic system, or a useless forest, as preparation for systemic change.

Differently said, systemic changes usually don't materialize if they are not already present in some anticipatory communities, even if those communities are modest in size and number. Such anticipatory communities initially come about voluntarily. Here hearts, minds and perception of what is "real" are vital elements. Outward change springs from motivation, desire, and a driving dream. In Gandhi's words, we must *become* the change we seek, if we expect change to happen.¹¹ Or, to cite "A Buddhist-Christian Common Word on Structural Greed," "we must be peace in order to make peace."¹²

Which is only to say that effective change happens as the dialectical play of *both* elements. Strategy that relies upon only one is ineffective. Voluntary hearts-and-minds change will not suffice when the change needed is fundamental, extensive and against the grain of entrenched ways and institutions. But coerced behavioral change fails as well if there is no preparation for it and assent to it in people's "being."

That preparation and assent elicit a further note on change.

Firstly, for deep change to happen, the drag of normalcy must be resisted and conventional wisdom doubted. This is difficult but not impossible. While W. H. Auden speaks the truth, that often "[w]e would rather be ruined than changed,"¹³ abiding by conventional wisdom does not sport a good record.

The Ptolemaic world, for example, seemed right to millions over centuries. The sun rose in the east and set in the west. Clearly it circled Earth, the center of the universe. Then in 1633 Galileo offered a heresy: Earth is a rather small rock rounding the sun. Against all going wisdom, and science as well, Galileo was right. But only because he first doubted, then defied, conventional knowledge. "And yet it moves," he said of Earth to his accusers as they extracted his recantation.¹⁴

Another example. As recently as 50 years ago, geologists did not have a framework for understanding earthquakes, volcanoes, and other processes shaping the Earth. The theory Alfred Wegener proposed in 1912, that all the continents were once joined, then drifted apart, was dismissed despite the fact many a sixth grader could see Africa fitting Latin America nicely if you deleted the Atlantic Ocean. An unstable Earth simply didn't jibe with the conventional wisdom, even among most scientists. Yet now continental drift is standard science and a part of sixth grade texts.

Leadership and the first initiatives for major change, including perspectival change, usually come from minority communities at the edges or bottom of society.

On another front, and even more recently, faith in free global markets as the most efficient allocators of resources joined democracy as the most stable form of government and liberal individualism as a developing consensus. Growing prosperity and personal freedom would benefit all.¹⁵ A short decade or two later, the rationality and impartiality of providential markets looks suspect while the blindness of the global capitalist economy to the planet's health appears fatal to sustainability. The Age of Optimism and the Washington Consensus gives way to economic anxiety as conventional wisdom is doubted.

Our conclusion? If widespread, deep change is to happen, first some conventional wisdom and institutional inertia must lose its grip.

Secondly, leadership and the first initiatives for major change, including perspectival change, usually come from minority communities at the edges or bottom of society, disciple-like. Furthermore, good leaders normally know two worlds well, the neglected, degraded or oppressed world and the privileged, reigning one. Good leaders are also those for whom the dream, and some rage, drives the action. When Joseph's brothers complained, "here comes the dreamer again," (Gen. 37:19) they were right, but they didn't imagine the dreamy brother they sold into slavery would save both them and Egypt as an astute secretary of agriculture in Pharaoh's court. And Martin Luther King, the dreamer who knew two worlds, did not electrify the world by proclaiming, in Lincoln's shadow, "I Have a Nightmare," even though he had many. One of them—the assassin's bullet—killed him. The dream drives the action, and when the time is right and the soil prepared, the dream takes hold.

The numbers need not be impressive. The civil rights movement at its height found only 5-7 percent of the American public directly engaged. Many decisive events, like the sit-ins, involved less than a quarter of 1 percent! Small is often powerful. Think of the Buddha, Lao-Tzu, Jesus, Gandhi, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman. Their first followers were few. Among climate change campaigns, the worldwide 350.org movement and 10/10/10 global work day started with Bill McKibben and seven students at Middlebury College, Vermont. All this gives credence to a remark widely attributed to Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."¹⁶

Thirdly, while most every change movement starts small with the dreamers, it fails if influential allies in privileged circles are not forthcoming. The task is to alter systems so that required *behavioral* changes lead the way to better policy, new habits and a different way of life; and that requires the powers of multiplication. A movement's prophetic symbols and practices matter only if they help move from voluntary addition to mandatory multiplication.

In sum, effective change means altering perception and habits one story at a time, one shower and song at a time, one child, parent and boss at a time. In this sense, every revolution starts small and gets smaller. It's one-by-one-by-one-by-one. But deep change is finally effective only when it is also behavior changed via mutual enforcement mutually agreed upon, whether hearts and minds are wholly ready or not. This is systemic change, structural change, and, when far-reaching enough, paradigm change.

If we ask what forces lead to change, the responses cluster around several different elements.

Some students of change emphasize social movements—people acting together to bring about change in keeping with a cause. The change itself varies wildly. Some movements aim for regressive change, change that stops change and returns life to some desired, and often imagined, state. (The Ku Klux Klan's effort to “take America back” to an imagined white Protestant purity.) Some movements are reformist about institutions of society. (Abolition as an end to slavery, the extension of the franchise to the disenfranchised, the conversion of *laissez faire* capitalism to social welfare capitalism.) Some are secessionist. (The withdrawal of Asian republics from the Soviet Union in favor of governments of their own, or, in the U. S., the secession of southern states to form the Confederacy.) All are social movements as the means of change.

Other observers highlight the forces of nature. The death of the dinosaurs and their terrain allowed mammals, until then very small (mice-size to small dog-size), to become the mega-fauna of a different environment. The human population that eventually evolved and that, walking out of Africa, populated the Americas depended on a second force of nature, a land bridge from Asia. That land bridge later disappeared.

In our own time climate change is creating pervasive change through rising sea levels, extreme drought and deluge, and altered seasons affecting flora and fauna, pests, diseases, and predators. The current rendezvous with extinction and the loss of biodiversity through the gene pool reduction of industrialized agriculture and the destruction of habitat and species is also a force of nature, this time with heavy human influence. Future generations are inheriting a gene-poor world that will constrain their opportunities. This is a marked sea change from their ancestors' world.

Still other students argue the power of technology. Think of an invention—the ship, the plow, the printing press, the combustible engine, gunpowder, weapons of mass destruction, immunizations, birth control pills, automobiles, cameras and computers—and it's clear that world-altering change has followed in the wake of new or improved technologies.

Cultural diffusion is still another source. One society or culture adopts the ways of another—steel from Damascus, paper from China, Arabic numerals via India, philosophy and critical thinking from Greece, symphonic music from Europe, “pop” culture from the U. S., art and architecture from innumerable locales, staple foods from many sources (wheat from the Fertile Crescent, potatoes from Peru, corn from Mexico, rice from Asia). Or, on another front, imperial law and engineering from Rome, democracy's first steps from Greece, market capitalism from Europe.

It goes without saying that these sources of change—social movements, forces of nature, technology, and cultural diffusion—are not a menu of exclusive choices. They weave together in varying ways and often create outcomes that could never have been predicted or foreseen. (When

Thomas Newcomen scooped coal into the belly of the first “Atmospheric Steam Engine” in 1712 and substituted fossil fuel power for horses, he had no inkling whatsoever of the consequences of the fossil fuel interlude he had launched—further technological change, changes in culture and society, changes in nature itself.)

A final note ties change to ethics and morality.

All of these levels, sources and species of change, as well as the dialectic of change, engage moral choice and agency whenever

Sources of change—social movements, forces of nature, technology, and cultural diffusion—are not a menu of exclusive choices. They weave together in varying ways and often create outcomes that could never have been predicted or foreseen.

and wherever humans are a part of them. All are arenas of human moral responsibility, including some present forces of nature. And all entail a formidable range that parallels the reach of morality and ethics. For if ours is an era of planetary geo-physical change interlaced with social, political, economic, cultural, and technological change; and if this means change in ways of life and outlooks, then very little falls outside The Ethic We Need. Change of this kind and range is about *how we live and for what*, and precisely that is the heart of morality and ethics, certainly religious ethics. Religious communities trade in ways of life, the home page of ethics. They do so at every level, from cosmology to causes, from institutions and politics to rites, practices, and policies, from communal food and drink and song to quiet contemplation about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life.

Endnotes

1. From the essay by Henry David Thoreau, "An Address to All Intelligent Men," published in many places.
2. Cited from David Owen, "The Efficiency Dilemma: If our machines use less energy, will we just use them more?" *The New Yorker*, December 20, 2010: 79.
3. The Lukan parable.
4. Roger L. Shinn, *Forced Options: Social Decisions for the Twenty-first Century* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, Third Edition, 1991), 3.
5. From the July 4th address cited earlier.
6. Thomas Berry, "Conditions for Entering the Ecozoic Era," *The Ecozoic Reader*, The Center for Ecozoic Studies 2.1, Winter, 2002:11.
7. Berry, "Conditions for Entering the Ecozoic Era," *The Ecozoic Reader*, 10.
8. "Forget Shorter Showers: Why personal change does not equal political change," *Orion*, July/August, 2009: 18-19.
9. Bill McKibben, "Multiplication Saves the Day: How just a few of us can rescue the planet," *Orion*, November/December 2008:19. 18-19.
10. Bill McKibben, "Duty Dodgers," *Orion*, July/August 2010:11.
11. find source
12. "A Buddhist-Christian Common Word on Structural Greed: A Joint Statement" (4), available on the World Council of Churches website: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/>

[documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialog](#). The document is dated September 9, 2010, and was issued from a conference in Ching Mai, Thailand.

13. From "The Age of Anxiety" as cited by Wes Jackson, *Consulting the Genius of the Place*, 96.
14. See the discussion of Galileo and a major tenet of science, that "*perception is not always reality*," in Jackson, *The Genius of the Place*, 94-96.
15. See "Diminished Expectations," a review of Gideon Rachman's, *Zero-Sum Future* in *The New York Times Book Review*, January 30, 2011:19.
16. Cited from <http://en.wikiquote.org>.

LARRY L. RASMUSSEN is Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics Emeritus, Union Theological Seminary, New York City. His volume, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), won the prestigious Grawemeyer Award in Religion of 1997.

Excerpt used with permission. This book is scheduled for publication by Oxford University Press in 2010.

CHANGING the playing field—re-viewing WEALTH



by ELIZABETH DODSON GRAY

a lecture delivered March 31, 2011, Theological Opportunities Program

[Throughout, the author refers to “valentines,” a handmade tradition she and her husband David have followed over the years of fashioning custom-made valentines for friends needing affirmation and encouragement in the ‘season of love.’]

Our assumed measure of value

Our success-culture assumes that we measure the value of everything in money—and we celebrate athletes, movie stars, television stars and pop culture singers, who all have lots of money. In today’s culture of money and wealth, we assume that in almost everything and in every decision, “money calls the tune.” We think “That’s rational,” “That’s practical,” “That’s profitable.”

These words assume that this rational, practical, profitable way is the way *everyone* functions who is rational and intelligent. What we are assuming is that money is the major determining factor in almost every decision.

And if someone actually does something *not* in their own economic self-interest, it is noted as “unusual,” “remarkable,” even weird, and we scarcely know how to interpret such an aberration from the norm.

Jesus and wealth

[But] wealth is not just in money. Let me read to you from Luke 12:15-21:

Jesus said to them, “Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

And he told them a parable, saying “The land¹ of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

So in Jesus’ time this question of what constitutes real wealth was a question.

“Did you enjoy it?”

Money is not the primary asset in life—time is.

The gift of LIFE—our time of being alive—is an incredible gift.

Sometimes I have a fantasy about our life after death. It is that when we come into the presence of God, the still small voice will say expectantly, “Well, did you enjoy it?”

And we will say: “Enjoy what?”

And God will say: “My gift to you—LIFE—did you enjoy it?” And most of us will say incredulously: “Is that what we were supposed to do with it, ENJOY it?”

And God will say: “Yes! Time, life, beauty, it was a one-time gift from me to you—and I hoped you would enjoy it.”

When cancer is—and is not—an issue

My as-if daughter Missi Stern’s husband died in his early forties after a ten-year struggle with a brain tumor, and Missi has this mantra: “Every day you don’t receive a cancer diagnosis is a good day!”

I know when I received my breast cancer diagnosis at 54, that it radically changed my value system.

Things I thought were important yesterday seemed no longer important. Instead, for me, it was the thought of leaving the people I love in my life. And then I thought of the little things if everyday living that I would miss: orange juice for breakfast, a quiet cup of tea, a sunset, a flower.

As one of our Valentines said: “Ten thousand flowers in spring, the moon in autumn, a cool breeze in summer, snow in winter. If your mind is not clouded by unnecessary things, this is the

best season of your life.”

The mysterious randomness of life

Time (how long we get to live) and health, are undeniably wealth for us—but they are beyond our control. We stand before the mysterious randomness of life, in which some of us die early and others die later. It is truly random, and very unfair. It is a mysterious Russian roulette of time and health.

Perhaps this is part of the appeal for us of money. It seems more within our reach as we apply hard work—and we hope that with a little luck we will get rich.

But let’s consider TIME in a “big picture” way—time as a gift to humans on this planet in the universe. One of our Valentines asserts that “We are enveloped in the generosity of time.” But even our personal gift of time is dwarfed by the immense gift of God’s time in creation. We sing of such an expanse of time when we sing: “Before the hills in order stood . . .”

The time-grandeur of God

One summer my husband David and I traveled to the Grand Canyon. Here is truly the Creator God revealed in time and space. It took 2 billion years—which is 2,000 million years—to lay down the layers of sedimentary rock under ancient oceans which once were as long as entire continents.

And then for the last six million years what we now call the Colorado River has cut a mile deep into those layers of rock. Then rain and snow and wind have shaped the Grand Canyon to be the revelation of the time-grandeur of God, which we can now glimpse in this way only here, in this place. “Truly awesome.”

Let me give you a Valentine about the gift of time, which says: “This day is given to us; from it we make life.” This is a quotation from Corita, the artist/philosopher who did the extraordinary rainbows on the big gas tanks along the Southeast Expressway in Boston.

The gift of life and time is given to us each day when we awaken—and we take that gift, and we have choices about just how we use that time. Here we do have some control. We take this gift of life each day, and we shape it with our own hands, by what we value as wealth for us personally, and we shape it by how we live each day of the lifetime which is given to us.

What do I find valuable, as real personal wealth?

As we shape our lives, it seems necessary to ask ourselves this question: What do I find valuable, as real personal wealth?

My personal fist candidate for wealth is INTEGRITY. I mean

by that—being honest, being trustworthy, telling the truth, being consistent, having commitments and living by them, and a rock-hard sense of right and wrong, and living by that. All of what we used to call “character.” You know who among your friends and acquaintances has integrity.

I was brought to tears three years ago when our now-adult son, who was closing out a nine-year difficult night-delivery of newspapers (a business he did with his wife), casually mentioned that every quarter he collected from his newspaper dispensing machines (in front of convenience stores and restaurants) was logged into the bank and accounted for in his taxes. I suddenly realize that he had been in a totally unsupervised “cash” business when he could have so easily cheated on his taxes—and apparently it never occurred to him to cheat. I was so tearfully proud of him.

Martin Luther King, Jr., is quoted as saying, “It is always the right time to do what is right.” That’s integrity!

Knowing who you are

My second personal candidate for true wealth is IDENTITY. I mean Identity—knowing who you are, being who you are, liking who you are. Knowing and acting from your true identity is wealth.

Now I recognize that this problem of identity is often elusive, and enormously complicated by painfully abusive childhoods and by parents who are unaffirming. It is not easy sometimes even to discover who we are.

It is not easy sometimes to be authentically who we are. In the very early days of [this program, i.e., Theological Opportunities Program], about 1976, I was only a member of the committee, and at the same time David and I were assisting a senior faculty member at the MIT Sloan School of Management teach his seminar about “Critical Choices for the Future.” I had also begun lecturing about “Limits to Growth” issues around the U.S. and Canada to colleges and to religious gatherings. And I was also assisting the National Council of Churches with their Energy Study Project. The then-program coordinator took me aside one day and counseled me thusly: “You must not let these women know about what you are doing. They are just suburban housewives and if they know too much about you and what you are doing, they will treat you differently and not like you!”

I am afraid I said, “I’m too old to hide who I am. I am sure that the women on the committee can deal with me.”

Liking who you are

My third category for Identity was not only (1) know who you

are and (2) bring who you are, but (3) liking who you are. As many of you know, David and I have three times—no actually, four times—taken into our home women we knew who were about to be homeless. One was severely depressed. Another was sleeping under a bush in a park in Bristol, Rhode Island. One was about to lose her home, and one was about to be evicted with all her furniture out onto the street. They each stayed from six months to over a year with us, with free room and sometimes board—and of course a consequent intrusion upon our privacy. Our friends have often asked, “Why would you do that?” and I found myself replying, “I don’t ever want to be the kind of person who would let a woman be homeless, or sleep under a bush in a park, if I could do something about that, no matter what the cost.”

I don’t ever want to be that kind of person! It is fortunate that my life partner shares my feelings. But he now says, “Never again!”

The Valentine for this identity-kind of wealth says, “Celebrate your existence.”

The wealth we have in our relationships

We have been given still another kind of wealth, the wealth of relationships. Women have an intuitive way of weaving relationships around our lives and our families. And we are the richer for those priceless webs of relationships.

I am now reading from my memoir in a chapter entitled “Painting the Seasons Sacred” —which is about how we decorate our home.

By the time we have gotten to February it is still very cold outside in New England but our spirits thirst for the strong colors and sentiments of Valentine’s Day. David and I have created a new and passionate season of riotous red hearts around Valentine’s Day. It is neither a natural nor liturgical season, as our other seasons are, but it is something celebrated in our secular and commercial culture as only the romance of heterosexual love.

We have recaptured Valentine’s Day and we have made it serve our own purposes. All the blacks and browns and whites of our early midwinter decorating are now replaced by masses of hot-pink and red in hangings, in pillows, in art work, in table coverings.

This is the season when for many years we created homemade Valentines for our friends, working with what in nursery school they call ‘beautiful junk.’ We are down on our hands and knees on the floor, playing

with rug remnants and scraps of fabric and bits of paper lace, fashioning with red construction paper and Elmer’s Glue and odds-and-ends special messages of friendship and affirmation for those we know need such encouragement and companionship this year.

When in late February we are finally ready to lay down our home-made Valentine Season, we find ourselves filled with the warmth of the many relationships in which we nourish and sustain our life.”

Having a larger goal in life

My next kind of possible personal wealth is having a larger goal in life beyond MY life, MY family, MY career, etc. This is the commitment to a better life for all people and the planet.

Dreaming of a better world

I realize I feel sorry for people who don’t “get” the dream of a better life for all, whether you connect God with that dream or not. Wouldn’t you feel better eating if no one was starving? I think all the people who gave money after Haiti’s 2010 earthquake are people who clearly do reach out in compassion. Bill Clinton’s book *Giving*³ and his international giving program clearly understand that “giving” to make the world better makes people feel good. And even Bill Gates and Warren Buffet are deep into that.

My dream of equality and justice began early in my life. Perhaps my life-long view of this dream was indelibly and incurably affected by my growing up in Jim Crow segregation in Baltimore, Maryland. Growing up in the 1930s and ‘40s, I experienced the constant social oppression of anyone with dark skin, and it cast a very dark shadow over every aspect of living, for me.

I would like to live in a country where women, and people of color, and gays and lesbians, experience equality. I would like compassion for the poor and disadvantaged to play out in taxes for the rich and social services for those in need. I would like to get up in the morning in such a country, and go to bed in such a country. It bothers me to get up in injustice, and go to bed in injustice. And I have difficulty understanding why it doesn’t both more people.

Patriarchy as a New Jericho

But I can’t discuss the goal of a better life without discussing patriarchy. I am now going to read from a memoir chapter entitled ‘Beauty and the Beast: A Parable for Our Time.’ It is a chapter in the book *Women Respond to the Men’s Movement*⁴ published in 1992.

I often visualize patriarchy as a castle (much like the one in the Disney film “*Beauty and the Beast*”) standing high on a forbidding hill, an entrenched system of male power and privilege protecting fragile men living inside its defended walls and wide moats.

I also visualize the work of feminist women as being like Joshua in the Hebrew Scriptures, marching around those defended walls (Joshua 6:1-21). We are blowing our trumpets of the feminist critique of male culture, marching and blowing, blowing and marching, seven times around, even seventy times around, until the walls of this Jericho come tumbling down.

To dissolve the enchantment of patriarchy requires a feminist analysis of culture, something the pro-feminist wing of the Men’s Movement understands very well. These pro-feminist men understand that a men’s movement that is centered only upon men and is only pro-male, and only looks at the costs of masculinity (i.e., the costs of patriarchy to men), can never break out of its own environment.

To free ourselves from patriarchy, we must all—both women and men—become pro-female and look at the costs to women of male power, male privilege and male violence. It is also equally true that to free ourselves of racism, we can never just look at the cost to whites, but we must identify with the true costs to African-Americans of white power, white privilege and white violence.

Feminism’s role

So I see Feminism as leading the way in a cultural procession of conceptual Aha’s—the breaking of evil enchantments, as in ‘The Emperor has no clothes’ and ‘The wicked witch is dead.’

I would invite into our procession around the walled city of patriarchy all those whose lives are emerging out of the cultural myths of the past and coming into new and liberating identities which are expressions of their own uniqueness.

I invite to join us all women who are increasingly claiming their power to name themselves, and are finding in their re-naming that they change their world. Patriarchy has been a prison for women that none of us—women or men—any longer need.

I would also open our ranks to all those women who suddenly understood while watching the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings (October 11, 1991), that sexual harassment, rape, date rape, pornography, female sexual slavery, battering, and violent death for women, are part-and-parcel of patriarchal male power. I would welcome also all those women who that week learned anew that within patriarchy ‘A woman will not be believed.’

The solvent which will dissolve patriarchy

Feminism—recognition of the imbalance of power between men and women, combined with an explicit commitment to correct that imbalance—is the only solvent which will dissolve patriarchy and release all of us, women and men, from its power. It is like the water thrown upon the evil witch in *The Wizard of Oz*,⁵ which dissolves the witch down into a puddle—releasing from those being liberated, the triumphant shout, ‘The wicked witch is dead!’

But I also want to open our ranks to all the children who care about their future on this endangered planet. Patriarchy is a root cause of ‘ranking diversity.’ It is the conceptual basis for male dominion over—and exploitation of—‘lesser’ genders, lesser peoples, lesser races, lesser species, and the exploitation of nature and the planet itself. Patriarchy is thus a conceptual cancer, which is simply not compatible with the health of our interconnected Earth-system.⁶

And finally I open the ranks of our marchers to men. We can welcome every man who can finally touch his feelings, name his wounds, and look in new places for the core of his positive male energy, as Sam Keen does in his book *Fire in the Belly*.⁷

Walking with a transcendent presence in your life

Lastly, I cannot lay down the subject of personal wealth without speaking about the amazing wealth of walking with a transcendent Presence in your life, in this case my life.

It is not easy to find words to talk about a relationship with God. I have never tried to do that in a public speech. But I have struggled to find the words in bits and pieces when I have been writing my memoir, *Walking My Yellow Brick Road*. So I am going to stitch together some of those bits-and-pieces and read them to you now.

I first experienced this mysterious Presence at age 3. This is from the Prologue to my memoir:

A journey always has a beginning. It is possible the journey recorded in this book began in my earliest memory—a memory of golden sunshine and of being a child small enough to play sheltered among the massive white and blue hydrangea bushes planted by my grandfather in my back yard. The sun is warm, and I feel connected and companioned by all that is around me.

I think this is where my religious feelings first joined my feelings for nature. I have always felt connected in some profound way with the ultimate transcendent dimensions of my life whenever I have allowed myself to experience the mystery and majesty of the created world.”

And then from my chapter on “Walking My Yellow Brick Road: Part I”:

I had felt called to the ministry very early in my life—perhaps prior to high school. As early as I can remember my own consciousness, I had felt myself in a special relationship to the Ultimate Other in my life, whom I had been taught to call God.

In my teenage years I imagined that Ultimate Other as the one who pulled on the other side of the rubber-band of my identity. And I soon discovered that, for me to be whole, centered, rooted in my own deepest identity, then the rubber-band of my relationship to that Other must be centered and in place also. Through trial and error I had discovered that, when I moved away from that plumb line in my soul, I soon felt unreal, shallow, fragmented and frenetic—literally out of touch with myself.”

Now today, if you ask me what it is like to have a relationship with a transcendent reality in your life, I would have to say it is like falling in love—hard to describe, but you know it is real, you know when it is happening to you.

“Why do the birds sing”

Let me read you now a portion of a memoir chapter entitled “Why Do the Birds Sing?: Healing after Trauma.” This is a chapter written after my breast cancer surgeries and post-surgical complications. This passage describes a moment which was for me a transcendent moment, indeed a transforming moment..

This morning is an extraordinary morning for me. But in order to understand that, you have to understand my last two-and-a-half years. This was the first morning in two-and-a-half years that, when I came awake, I was not in pain. I was reveling in my newly regained abilities to feel and be without pain, when I noticed the birds singing. I glanced at the digital clock; it was 8:30AM, yet they were singing as though it were dawn.

And as I lay there listening, I remembered another time, another place. I was near the Delaware Water Gap atop a mountain in eastern Pennsylvania. It was the time of morning meditation at Kirkridge, an ecumenical retreat center, and as a sun-lover I chose to do my quiet time outside on the deck of the lodge with a 240-degree unobstructed view of the horizons all around me.

As I was settling into a comfortable position in the sun, I noticed that there was a bird perched on the very top of each of the four tall trees whose tips were near the deck of the lodge. And those birds were all singing.

As I ‘centered in’ to meditate, I suddenly came to the strangest feeling, that I was coming late to prayers and that the birds were already deep into their morning praise and I was being privileged to join them, except that I did not know how to sing.

So today, listening to the birds through my open bedroom window, I again felt as though I were somehow slipping late into a pew and joining a celebration already in progress.

But this time I asked myself a new question—‘Why do the birds sing?’ The answer came to me strong and clear from someplace deep in me or deep within the universe—‘Birds sing because rejoicing is the center of the universe.’”

What an amazing thought—that “rejoicing is the center of the universe.” It is a thought, an insight, an epiphany, that is so revelatory that it changes the way you view your life, lived within that universe.

I have tried to express that different view of life in this last Valentine. Walking in such a luminous life is truly wealthy.

Dodson Gray, continued on page 40

Seeds of DELIGHT: toward a spirituality of gardening



by STEVE HOLT

*What was Paradise?
but a garden,
an orchard of trees
and herbs, full of pleasure,
and nothing there but delights.
~William Lawson*

Prior to taking up gardening four summers ago, I had experienced little of the agrarian life. I'd visited farms, helped out in others' gardens, and written about food and agricultural issues, but to me, the life of one who plants, cultivates, waters and harvests was largely lost on me. I couldn't understand why poet and farmer Wendell Berry ascribed great spiritual meaning to the cycles and practices of agriculture. ("The Grower of Trees, the gardener, the man born to farming / whose hands reach into the ground and sprout / to him the soil is a divine drug.")

Since starting our garden, I have begun to relate to Berry's poetic farmer and his "divine drug," the soil. The summer after we moved to Boston, we were given a plot in a neighborhood community garden. It was an experiment for both of us, having been raised in the suburbs. I recall not knowing what to plant where, and we ended up letting a more experienced gardener lay out our plot from beginning to end. What's more, with no local water source at the garden plot, we were forced to haul our water about a mile, giving us insights into the reality of many around the world who live in areas where water is scarce. That novice garden is a classic rite of passage for us non-green-thumbed. I'd be surprised if we got a carton's worth of cherry tomatoes the whole season. But here's the thing about gardening: there's always next year.

That next year, we indeed purchased and moved into one of the only houses in our urban neighborhood that came with a sizeable yard—a shared yard in a cluster of townhouses. When we moved in, the yard was underutilized and looking a bit ragged. We immediately envisioned a yard full of raised bed gardens growing delicious vegetables and beautiful flowers. We

envisioned our neighbors pitching in and enjoying the fruits of their labor. (This yard had not one, but two external water sources!) Still, as gardeners, we were as clueless as they come. Our education would come through reading books, Internet articles, and (most significantly) the hard knocks of watching plants die, pests invade, and seeds simply not come up. We would discover, like writer Kathleen Norris, gardening to be an "exercise in faith."¹

We now have four raised-bed gardens (and a number of plants in pots and directly in the ground). We continue to learn much about maximizing food production in a tiny area, as well as what grows well (and what doesn't) in our sometimes harsh New England climate. Our garden has revolutionized our eating habits, to be sure. Most importantly (and, perhaps, most surprisingly), has been its impact on our souls. In this article, I attempt to lay out a cursory spirituality of gardening.² Read this like a series of reflections rather than a comprehensive theological work. No doubt I am not the first to make a case for a spirituality of gardening, nor is gardening a recent spiritual practice. Only in the last century, with the rise of the city and industry in the West, have the majority of Western Christians not gardened or farmed. My insights here are primarily intended for people of faith in the West, where widespread urbanization/suburbanization have created a wide chasm between most of us and our land. Even today, it is quite likely that a large percentage—if not a majority—of Christians engage in agricultural practices, what with the bulk of the Earth's 2.5 billion Christians living in Africa, China, and South America.

Here in the West, though, could gardening be conceived of as a spiritual discipline with implications for how we picture

God, ourselves, and our world? Could we return in practice to lives that embrace more holistically the natural world? And could we do this as an act of engagement with the Earth and humanity rather than one of disengagement (à la Thoreau)? I believe we can and must, and my hope is that this article conveys a few of the spiritual insights I've been digging up since becoming a gardener.

God planted a garden

According to the world's three major monotheistic religions, history began in a garden. The Abrahamic faiths trace their ancestry back to an almost unbelievable story in which the Earth consists of two human beings living in communion with their creator in a garden, which we call Eden. The Genesis account is a poem that reveals that at the core of our being, humans are inextricably tied to the land. Indeed, a strong case can be made that we were, from the beginning, intended to garden. This was the design from the beginning:

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

²⁹ Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.³

Genesis 2 describes how God breathed life into humankind in the same way that he sent rain on the earth to raise up the shrubs. It goes on to describe the garden, Eden, that God planted in the east:

There he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It's interesting to note that even before God punishes the humans for their sin, Adam and Eve are tending to the garden and ruling over the livestock. In this light, "work" (at least in God's garden) wasn't a product of human rebellion, but rather a part of the delights of perfect Eden. It is clear from this text that there is something intrinsically human about gardening—the kind of gardening that produces fruit that is both "pleasing to the eye and good for food." One apocryphal Armenian tale even suggests that when Adam & Eve were expelled from the garden, they were so distraught at the loss of their former life—of gardening together in communion with God—that God had pity and gave them our world, with its trees and plants, in which to live. Building on this in *The Fragrance of God*, Armenian Orthodox theologian Vigen Guroian writes:

Some of the early Christian writers speculate that in Paradise gardening was not drudgery but sheer delight. When Adam gardened, he imitated his Maker in a purely recreative act of cultivation and care. He did not need to subdue the earth in order for it to yield fruit. Rather, the plants were Adam's palette, and the earth was his canvas. There was nothing but delight in the Garden, for Eden itself means "garden of delight."

As we all know, the "garden of delight" would last only a short while. How quickly the first humans lost sight of their humanity, which had been deeply rooted in constant communion with God. Against this backdrop, we can safely conclude that the further from we drift from the natural world the less human we become. This statement calls into question

*The further from we drift
from the natural world the
less human we become.*

the inherent righteousness of endless progress throughout human history and especially critiques the "advancements" of humanity in the last two centuries. And today, in an age in which information and communication come instantly through computers that fit in our pockets, in which "food" we eat has been genetically modified beyond recognition, and in which waiting has become an antiquated pastime, we remain disconnected while experiencing the illusion that we are connected.

One of the symptoms of the disconnected lives we lead—both from our Creator and from each other—is our disconnect from the garden. The land, it seems, has become something to pillage and exploit in our incessant pursuit of progress. Most of us no longer know the origin of our food, if most of it can even be called that. Most of us eat what we want when we want it, and waiting is not even an option. Most of us rarely, if ever, venture into nature to simply marvel. Each of these is a part of God’s original intent for humanity, revealing or manifesting important truths about God and ourselves.

Gardening as an act of creation

We live in the city. Almost anywhere we can travel by foot, bus or subway, we are surrounded by concrete, asphalt and steel. Like almost every urban area, little remains of the natural beauty that originally characterized the land where our city now resides. To be sure, the architecture, shadows, created landscapes, and plazas of the city possess a beauty all their own, but we humans still long for the natural splendor that embodied Eden.

In the same way, even the earth cries out for a return to its unmolested state. As Wendell Berry writes, “the soil under the grass is dreaming of a young forest, and under the pavement the soil is dreaming of grass.”⁴ We were fortunate enough to have found one of the only houses in our neighborhood that came with a fairly large (for the city) yard. With triple-decker homes, metal fences, concrete parking lots, and brick highrise buildings on all sides of us, we venture into our yard each spring with seeds or seedlings in hand to re-create a piece of Eden’s lushness and promise. When we garden, we join God in an eternity-long act of remaking that which has been broken. Or, to put it in agricultural terms, we participate in replanting that which has been uprooted.

What should become of our existing cities, then? Well, the biblical narrative points to an eschatological existence that conjoins garden and city in a perfectly symbiotic relationship. In Revelation, the holy city that will come down out of heaven from God possesses all the trappings of the “concrete jungle,” with one notable difference: a river flows through it, and on either side is the fruit-bearing Tree of Life. In this biblical vision, writes Paul Escamilla in *Longing for Enough in a Culture of More*, we’re given “a garden and a city conjoined, a marriage of farm and factory, soil and steel, green and gold.”⁵ I like to

think that when I kneel at the base of a 100-year-old highrise apartment building and tenderly place lavender in fresh compost, I am foreshadowing the completion of the new heavens and new Earth—the culmination of God’s ongoing creation.

Gardening as a reflection of God

Our ancient ancestors would have found an article lauding the virtues of agrarian life curious, to say the least. After all, they depended on bounteous harvests each season to simply survive. What’s more, their very survival rested on factors far outside their control, making many farmers acutely aware of their place in the universe. Whether they believed in gods, a god, or simply the majesty of nature, these men and women of old understood at their core that forces existed beyond their temporal lives. Not surprisingly, the humans of scripture are, by and large, agrarian. Many of the stories, divine instructions, parables, and illustrations—no fewer than 140 Bible verses—are agricultural, because that was the world in which they lived.

The rise of rationalism and skepticism corresponded with the start of the modern industrial revolution, in which humans began their gradual separation from the land. An influx of time- and energy-saving inventions and fewer humans (especially in the West) relying on the agricultural cycles for their very lives contributed, I believe, in no small way to the dissipation of supernatural belief in the West.

This very well may be why God chose to begin the grand labor of love in a garden. It’s a place where we must relinquish control to that which is more powerful, and yet the garden is one of God’s favorite canvases on which to showcase creativity and resplendent beauty. In Eden, God would forever do what God does best: create. And boy, was that creation *good*. After all, not only was the food Adam and Eve ate nourishing, it was also pleasing to the eye.⁶

Gardening reveals much about God’s nature. For one, God creates. God is a giver of good things. God’s ways are mysterious, higher than our ways. The appearance of God’s presence varies from season to season. God desires communion with us, the workers who have been placed as stewards of creation. And the list goes on.

At its most basic level, gardening connects humankind with its creator. If we give ourselves over fully to the practice of gar-

When we garden, we join God in an eternity-long act of remaking that which has been broken. Or, to put it in agricultural terms, we participate in replanting that which has been uprooted.

dening, we must give ourselves over to the mysteries therein. Of daffodils back year after year, of a tiny seed that becomes a great pumpkin, of the unmatched taste of a basil leaf. These are mysteries—miracles, even—that human ingenuity had little to do with. Sure, we plant, weed, water, and harvest—but the increase, well, that’s given to us by God.

Gardening as a mirror of ourselves

In his little book *Inheriting Paradise: Meditations on Gardening*, Vigen Guroian gives us some of the most important insights available anywhere into the spiritual significance of the garden. His Armenian Orthodox heritage, whose observance of the liturgical calendar meditates on the everyday stuff of life alongside the Divine, will allow Guroian to do nothing less. At its most basic level, Guroian writes that the garden teaches him much about himself:

When I garden, earth and earthworm pass between my fingers and I realize that I am made of the same stuff. When I pinch the cucumber vine and the water drips from the capillaries to soil, I can feel the blood coursing through my body. Man is a microcosm in whose flesh resonates and reverberates the pulse of the whole creation, in whose mind creation comes to consciousness, and through whose imagination and will God wants to heal and reconcile everything that sin has wounded and put in disharmony.

Somewhere along the way, we’ve forgotten that we humans—like every tree, blade of grass, forest animal, and clod of dirt—are fragile, carbon-based creatures. From dust we came, and from dust we will return—an inevitability we share with every plant that sprouts from the earth. But . . .

The garden also reminds us that death and decay eventually give way to resurrection and new life. Wendell Berry writes that the farmer “enters into death yearly, and comes back rejoicing. He has seen the light lie down in the dung heap, and rise again in the corn.”⁷ This is, at its essence, the Christian story. We quickly forget that when the dust settles, love wins the day.

Sixteenth-century mystic Teresa of Avila compared the human soul to a garden in which God delights to walk and rest.⁸ Furthermore, she asserted that the garden of our soul requires pruning and care when we lose our center and forget that our Beloved lives within us. Dwelling in the love of God through spiritual practices will result in a soul that is fragrant and fruit-bearing.

“ . . . nearer to godliness . . . ”

Vigen Guroian writes that “gardening is nearer to godliness than theology.”⁹ He may be right. Theologically, history is bookended by gardens. In the beginning, the garden is where humanity went wrong. But a garden is also where God set into motion the rescue plan to make things right by raising Jesus from the dead. And we are shown a vision in Revelation of a new heaven and new Earth comprised of a garden within a city. The theological significance of gardening cannot be understated.

But maybe Guroian means something much earthier, more *ordinary*. The practice of gardening itself is a spiritual discipline, revealing much about God, ourselves, the beauty and brokenness of the world, nature, death, and life. Like life, it is thorny, messy, ritualistic and lovely, a practice that holds the potential to make us more human—more *godly*.

Endnotes

1. Norris, Kathleen. *The Cloister Walk*. Riverhead Books, 1996.
2. This would include farming as well. However, since most readers are not and will never farm full-time, I am simplifying it to gardening.
3. Genesis 1:26-31, Today’s New International Version.
4. Berry, Wendell. “In a Country Once Forested.” *Given: Poems*. Counterpoint, 2006.
5. Escamilla, Paul. *Longing for Enough in a Culture of More*. Abingdon, 2007.
6. Genesis 3:6, Today’s New International Version.
7. Berry, Wendell. “The Man Born to Farming.” *Farming: A Hand Book*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1971.
8. St. Teresa of Avila. *The Life of St. Teresa of Avila*. Digireads.com Publishing, 2009.
9. Guroian, Vigen. *Inheriting Paradise: Meditations on Gardening*. Eerdmans. 1999.

STEVE HOLT is a father, husband, writer and armchair theologian living in Boston, Massachusetts. After completing a bachelor’s degree in journalism from Abilene Christian University, he stayed to complete a master’s degree in missions from ACU’s Graduate School of Theology. As a writer, his work has appeared in *The Boston Globe*, *The Boston Globe Magazine*, *Sojourners Magazine*, and *Christianity Today*.

practical eco-theology: models and resources to TRANSFORM YOUR CHURCH

by CASSANDRA CARMICHAEL, Director of the Eco-Justice Programs of the National Council of Churches



Introduction

Rain pours at Madison Christian Community Church in Wisconsin, nourishing a 6,000 square foot garden that the congregation tends. The flourishing ministry scatters seeds of hope for congregants, incarcerated people, and the surrounding low-income community. An ecumenical partnership

between Advent Lutheran Church (ELCA) and Community of Hope (UCC), this joint congregation is a church that reflects the future.

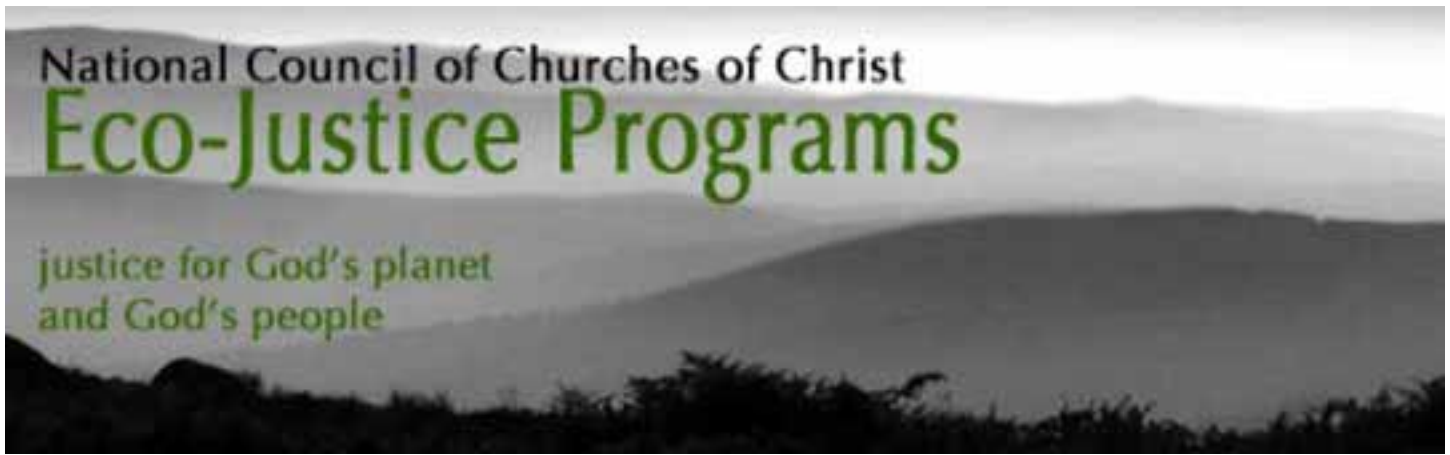
With solar panels on the roof and a parking lot full of hybrid vehicles, the congregation has put into practice its call to care for God's creation in significant and visible ways. The lawnmower is powered by vegetable oil and a labyrinth encourages congregants to connect to God's land through walking meditation and prayer. Rainwater from the sanctuary's roof fills four 300-gallon tanks from which water flows through underground tubing to the garden, where slow drip irrigation hoses snake through the vegetation. The vegetables not only nourish the soul and body, but help build bridges across social and economic lines. The congregation partners with a nearby correctional facility, offering horticultural classes in their garden. Inmates sow the seeds for the garden and tend the seedlings as they grow. When ready for planting, the inmates

deliver the seedlings to Madison Christian Community Church and spend a day tending the soil. The garden also provides produce for a nearby low-income community. "The garden ministry is one way to bridge the racial, economic, and social barriers that exist between people today," according to Rev. Jeff Wild, Pastor of Advent Lutheran Church. Members from the church welcome inmates with homemade baked goods as well as shade-grown, fair-trade coffee.

Congregations such as Madison Christian Community Church provide a glimpse into the future where congregations join together ecumenically not only to share worship space but to be in ministry with the community through creation care.

A theological foundation for creation care

With their moral authority and organized structures, religious organizations have played a key role in social change—from abolishing slavery to civil rights. When faith communities began focusing on environmental sustainability, it was with a vigor birthed from a place of faith and hope. This moral conviction led a group of twelve theologians and practitioners to gather at the College of Preachers in Washington, DC, in September 2004 to deliberate on the theological foundations of the eco-justice work of the community of Christian communions which gathers as the National Council of Churches (NCC). This group, convened by the NCC Eco-Justice Program, included theologians such as Father John Chryssavgis, Bishop Thomas Hoyt, Dr. Carol Johnston, Dr. Larry Rasmussen and the Rev. Dr. Paul Santmire, who reflected upon the call to care for God's creation as first outlined in Genesis and to care for "the least of these" as articulated in the gospel of Matthew (Mt 25:45). This fruitful gathering yielded *God's Earth is Sacred: An Open Letter to Church and Society in the United States*, an ecumenical statement on the environment.



The theologians summarized the centrality of eco-justice in the life of the church today: “We believe that, in boundless love that hungers for justice, God in Jesus Christ acts to restore and redeem all creation... [‘eco-justice’] is not a competing ‘program alternative,’ one ‘issue’ among many. In this most critical moment in earth’s history, we are convinced that the central moral imperative of our time is the care for earth as God’s creation.”

The NCC works to fulfill this integrated ministry of creation care ecumenically through its Eco-Justice Program office and Eco-Justice Working Group. Central to the program’s success is its ability to bring various communions together, regardless of theology or institutional culture, to work on critical “eco-justice” issues. Most importantly, though, the program has ignited the passions of people of faith across the fabric of church life to join together in helping to protect and restore right relationships with the rest of God’s creation.

Eco-theology: history and context

The scriptures held sacred by Christians are replete with reference to the goodness of creation. A tradition of reverence for nature as the handiwork of God has persisted since early Christianity, before the age of environmentalism and the birth of eco-theology. Drawing from scripture, many Christians believed God was revealed in nature. Saint Augustine in the fifth century, as well as Meister Eckhart and Saint Thomas Aquinas almost a millennium later, proclaimed nature as a pathway to relationship with God. In the thirteenth century, Saint Francis of Assisi, often considered the patron saint of ecology, spoke of the elements of creation as siblings, members of an inter-related web of relationships, challenging Christian anthropocentrism and oft-held notions of hierarchy and dualism. The spirituality of Francis is very much in harmony with centuries of tradition within Celtic Christianity’s theology, practice and spirituality. Throughout Christian history, monastic communities worldwide have consciously sought to live in harmony and peace with creation. Drawing on these and other strains of thought and practice, eco-theology emerged as a theme in

ecumenical discussions in the middle of the twentieth century.

Joseph Sittler, a professor of systematic theology at Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary, was one of the first theologians in the U.S. to base environmental ethics on Christian faith. In 1961, Sittler spoke of “cosmic redemption” in an address to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in New Delhi, stating that all life, not just humans, were potential objects of God’s saving grace. His stewardship model was not anthropocentric, but driven by the responsibility to obey Christ in protecting creation. A student of Sittler, Richard Baer, took Sittler’s work a bit further and, drawing upon ecological sciences, discussed the interrelationships of God’s creation and the “web of life.”

The Faith-Man-Nature Group, which began within the NCC in 1963, took up the theological debates of the time and, as a group, aimed “to understand man’s relationship with nature in the light of religious faith and to spell out ethical imperatives for the conservation of natural resources.” Eco-theologian and member of the group, Paul Santmire connected environmental ethics to right relationships and social justice—not just in terms of human interaction but as it applies to the entire spectrum of life on earth. Similarly, John B. Cobb, Jr., a professor at the School of Theology in Claremont, extended his moral vision beyond humans and into biospheres and ecosystems. Feminist theologian at Vancouver School of Theology, Dr. Sallie McFague, brought to light the long lost “organic” tradition in Christianity in which the church, as the body of Christ, is a body firmly rooted in the earth. Her nonhierarchical theological worldview argued for the holiness of the earth.

“Water pollution, climate change, endangered species, and other environmental problems are a direct result of our lack of right relationship with God, with one another, and with the rest of creation,” says John Hill, of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church and co-chair of the Eco-Justice Working Group, which informs the work of Council on eco-justice issues. “Our society’s focus on materialism and consumerism renders our collective spirituality

hollow, and ultimately leads to the degradation of all of God's creation—human and nonhuman.”

Eco-life and work

As theologians were grappling with ecological issues, churches were hard at work creating policies and programs to guide congregants in their environmental ministries. In the 1970s and 1980s, in order to create a foundation from which to work on environmental issues, many churches began developing policy statements and resolutions on eco-justice. In 1983, the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver adopted a process which facilitated what came to be known as Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) and encouraged churches to work on these interrelated themes.

In 1984 member communions of the NCC formed the Eco-Justice Working Group and began working on issues such as acid rain and endangered species. The Working Group has been able to leverage limited staff resources and finances successfully. “Fellowship and relationship have been at the center of our work together,” says Steve DeYoung of the Reformed Church in America, treasurer of the Eco-Justice Working Group: “With so many communions unable to fully staff an environmental office, working together has become essential.”

Resourcing pews and pulpits, people and places

The member communions of the NCC collaborate in creating a rich and varied set of resources. Each year, for example, the Eco-Justice Working Group produces an Earth Day Sunday worship resource which has covered issues such as energy, oceans, climate change and lands. Focusing on worship resources has been a key component to the work in this ecumenical eco-justice community. They help congregations to give praise and thanks for God's life-giving love, to celebrate and honor creation, to confess sins of environmental degradation, to re-energize commitment to environmental justice, and to express longing for healing of the earth and its people. These resources provide teachable moments—an opportunity to use hymns, prayers, sermons, worship bulletin inserts and liturgies to enhance the congregation's appreciation for the Creator's works and to understand human responsibility for stewardship of creation.

The NCC has developed educational resources for all ages for both laity and clergy. These resources play a key role in motivating change in both behaviors and attitudes. Often these resources have led to further engagement by religious organizations and congregations. For instance, *Your Health and the Environment*, published by the NCC in 1997, inspired

the NCC's current environmental health initiative which was launched in 2007.

The Council's Eco-Justice Program Office creates training opportunities to equip clergy and lay leaders for environmental ministries. A variety of religious groups and coalitions host special conferences and training events regionally and nationally. One such training program is the eco-justice young adult ecumenical training program held bi-annually in Port Isobel, Virginia. Held on a small, isolated island accessible only by boat, this training helps emerging faith leaders incorporate creation care into their ministries.

The church and Green buildings

Congregations do not only teach through the curricula, training and worship they offer. They also educate through the 'hidden curriculum' embodied in the ways they construct and maintain their buildings and grounds. Although many congregations have taken up the charge to 'green' their buildings through increased energy efficiency, other congregations are taking a more integrated ministry approach—combining social justice ministry with fiscal stewardship and environmental responsibility.

One such group is an interfaith coalition of more than 90 congregations working to green low-income housing in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement (HCCI) celebrated the recent opening of David and Joyce Dinkins Gardens, a new, green, affordable housing development. Nicknamed “The Dinkins,” the 85-unit development features an environmentally friendly Green Grid Roofing system. The system reduces energy costs and urban “heat island” effects and provides sound insulation and storm water management. Rain water harvested from the roof will irrigate the property's landscaping and community garden and clean the sidewalks. Other green features include sun shading and an in-plank ventilation system.

“We will see great savings in water and sewer rates, which have gone through the roof in New York,” said Ms. Lucille McEwen, Esq., President and Chief Executive Officer of HCCI. Not only will green innovations save money, they also reflect an active step toward environmental justice.

. . . Stewardship

One church in Stevens Point, WI, takes its stewardship call to the land. St. Paul's United Methodist Church is restoring prairie land on its own five-acre site and teaching its congregation and community about environmental stewardship in the process.

“Churches are big property owners,” said church member, Dr. Dennis Yockers. “It is important for us to be stewards of these resources by making sustainable land management choices.”

The church stopped cutting the lawn, and within six weeks native wildflowers and grasses popped up from the ground. Five years later, the land boasts 45 species of grasses and wildflowers, more than 15 different species of butterflies, and at least eight species of dragonflies. Three birdhouses welcome bluebirds, tree swallows and chickadees. Ground-dwellers include mice, ground squirrels and cottontail rabbits.

Now the prairie is a teaching tool for church members and for the community. Signs describe plants and prairie wildlife. Articles in the church newsletter teach members about the prairie seasons. A nearby public school uses the land to teach local ecology. The connection with the land people feel when walking the prairie has a spiritual component as well. “When you connect people’s spiritual lives with the land, the concept of stewardship becomes more meaningful,” said Yockers.

... *Environmental justice*

“I don’t think that ‘eco-justice’ work should be separate from any of the other aspects of ecumenism and our ecclesiology,” said DeWayne Davis of The Episcopal Church (USA). “The church is about eco-justice since it is about the mission of the gospel. It needs to be understood as intrinsic to the theology and practice as much as any other Christian value and virtue: feed the poor, work for peace, care for creation - all of creation.”

Perhaps the most striking way that faith communities have joined social justice ministry with creation care is in the area of environmental justice. In 1987, the United Church of Christ (UCC) released a report that documented environmental injustices related to the location of toxic waste facilities based on race and socioeconomic class and coined the term ‘environmental racism’ to describe this disparity. In the fall of 1991, the UCC hosted the first environmental summit for people of color. This groundbreaking report and the ensuing summit have become a cornerstone of the environmental justice movement in the United States.

... *Climate change*

In 1999, the Interfaith Climate Change Campaign, an initiative developed by the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) and the NCC, launched a series of statewide campaigns which took root in 21 states. These campaigns seeded a faith-based grassroots movement and network that resulted in strong education and advocacy. In 2002, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency gave the Energy Star Award

to the NCC and the COEJL for their interfaith climate education and outreach efforts.

First Grace United Methodist Church (UMC) of New Orleans, LA, is one congregation that is seeking ways to save energy and address climate change. “One of the most at-risk cities for the effects of global warming is New Orleans, and one of the biggest contributors is energy usage,” according to Sarah Fleming, one of the church volunteers. Fleming and three other live-in church volunteers received training and conducted energy audits at churches throughout the New Orleans area, finding at least \$2,000 in savings at each location. First Grace UMC now uses compact fluorescent light bulbs, has conservation reminders posted around the building and has made a variety of other energy-saving improvements.

The Rev. Michael McClain personifies the environmental justice work of the Council by reaching out to historic black churches, explaining the ways in which climate change is impacting people in poverty and people of color. Although climate change affects all people, a Congressional Black Caucus Foundation report found that climate change will disproportionately impact African Americans. McClain says this is news to many African American church leaders. Church leaders are responding to McClain’s warning call. “The black church has always moved for change,” said McClain. More than 150 African-American clergy have endorsed the Faith Principles on Global Warming developed by the NCC. McClain is empowering leaders for additional advocacy, helping them draft letters to congress and op-ed pieces for their local newspapers.

“The church must speak to this issue,” said McClain. “It is Christ’s call to the church. We have a mandate from Christ to take care of those who can’t look out for themselves. If the church isn’t responding, who will?”

Vision of the future

Despite the tremendous and varied creation care ministries conducted around the country and in spite of the number of programs and religious organizations addressing environmental issues, the readiness and willingness of congregational members to translate their faith into specific actions—whether political, community-based, or personal—varies greatly. It is in that spectrum of engagement and passion, that faith-based environmental activists and leaders in the eco-justice movement must learn to work. The focus needs to stay on equipping congregations to integrate environmental ministries into the existing fabric of their religious life. Additionally, it will

become increasingly important to provide training and resources—educational and liturgical—to those clergy and laity who want to conduct environmental ministries.

In the next decade, because of the economic challenges facing many church institutions and a shift into a post-denominational Christian church, ecumenism will be even more important in the work to produce vibrant creation care ministries. As our lifestyles impact God's Creation, putting pressure on land, water, air and other gifts from God, it will become increasingly imperative to work together as more of a unified body in order to keep intact the community of life.

Most importantly, perhaps, is the need for eco-justice not to become a "separate" program area of the church. Environmental problems and issues are by their very nature complex and interconnected to social injustices such as poverty and racism. Only by tying environmental ministries to existing church ministries, will progress be made on any social justice front. "The goal of living life together as church and as responsible stewards of the environment are intertwined," said Leslie Woods, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) "Achieving a corporate life of Christ together will not be possible without also addressing how our corporate life impacts creation."

A group of faith representatives recently gathered in Annapolis, MD, to discuss the future vision of creation care and environmental ministries. The group, which contained representatives from the Orthodox, Anglican, mainline Protestant and historic peace church traditions, commented on the need to enhance further the theological understanding of creation care and to link churches together in their work on environmental issues. It was clear in the discussion that connections to poverty and

social justice were a pivotal part of their future vision.

"Caring for creation is vital to the life and ministry of the NCC and its member communions because of the greatest commandment to love both God and neighbor," commented Greg Larzakovitz of the Church of the Brethren. It is clear that speaking to those in the pews in a way that resonates is a key priority for creation care work. As clergy and laity continue to work on creation care issues, it is imperative that they communicate that creation care is a central part of being church—of caring for our neighbor

Inherent in that moral call is the desire to address current lifestyle trends. "As people of faith we can help Christian communities further understand the ties between environment and justice and personal lifestyles," said Mike Schut, Episcopal Church. "As Christians, we need to practice, model and embody a way of life more fulfilling, whole and joyful than that which is sold to us by our culture. We should preach a life that is instead based on healed relationships, community and love."

Note: Unless otherwise noted, scripture references are taken from Bruce Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books: New Revised Standard Version, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); also cited as NRSV. When noted, scripture passages are taken from Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Revised Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); also cited as RSV.

CASSANDRA CARMICHAEL is director of the [Eco-Justice Programs of the National Council of Churches](#).

Just a few of the resources available on the NCC Eco-Justice website . . .



Just Climate: Study Guide for Adult Christian Education

Climate change is a hot topic today, but not everyone understands the issue. This activity is designed to help your group better understand how our atmosphere works, why it's heating up, and what impacts global warming is having on the planet.

Where Two or More are Gathered: Eco-Justice as Community (Earth Day 2011)



Today, we remain mindful of the importance of community. In the midst of cultural and economic forces that encourage and reward individualism, Christians are called to reach beyond ourselves, to embrace all God's children and affirm our interconnectedness and interdependence



toward a missional understanding of teen consumerism

by BRIAN KIRK

Though the recession has hit many people hard, both nationally and globally, it seems it may have brought some unexpected benefits for teens in the United States. In a just released survey by Charles Schwab, teen respondents seem to indicate that the financial crisis in the country has provided them a new perspective on the balance between our culture's invasive celebration of consumerism and a theology of "enough."

If we are to believe what we see in media, we might be convinced that our teens have been so heavily baptized in the waters of mall clothing stores and upscale coffee shops that they are willing to spend their money on whatever is the trendiest at the moment—no questions asked. We may be convinced that young people are often thoughtless when it comes to exercising their purchasing power. They buy what they want when they want it and with little thought to the impact on anyone else. But is this depiction accurate?

The 2011 Schwab Teens and Money Survey offers a more complex picture of young consumers. The findings suggest that youth today have taken notice of the recession and it has changed their attitudes about consumption. According to the study, most teens say they are grateful for what they already have and are less likely than they might have been just a few years ago to ask for things they really don't need. The majority in the survey reported appreciating what they already receive from their families and acknowledge the need to better understand how debt affects themselves and others.

These attitudes among teens are certainly a good start for those of us who would like to help the younger generations find a more meaningful way forward when it comes to a theology of enough. They offer a sound foundation for helping young people develop a more missional approach to their attitudes about consumerism. This term "missional" has become a buzz word within the emerging church movement and is variously

understood. At its most basic, I would argue that being missional refers to a constant awareness of our participation in God's mission of justice and peace in the world. Thus, a missional approach to consumerism invites one to see that our financial activity impacts others and also impacts God. The ways we use our financial resources and exercise our financial power can either invite us to be partners in God's activity or to work against God's movement in the world. More and more, I would argue, Christian youth have come to understand this choice and it is affecting the ways they interact in the marketplace.

Nowhere have I seen this trend more clearly than with Christian youth who see that their consumerist activities do not occur within a bubble. They know that what they choose to do with their money can have repercussions globally. They know, for example, that their choice to buy a shirt from a low-cost retailer might mean they are perpetuating unfair labor practices in another country. They are aware that cheap products here could mean that a teen factory worker in South America goes to bed hungry. The teens I know understand that though they will likely never meet that factory worker, he or she is part of our human family, a brother or sister—a fellow child of God.

It is this understanding of how we are all connected together globally by the bonds of our humanity and our centeredness in God that has encouraged some teens and young adults to become involved in the fair trade movement. More high schools, colleges, and churches are offering fair-trade food products to teens for educational activities and fundraisers as a way to increase awareness about ethical consumerism. It is hoped that these opportunities to purchase fair-trade products will help young people see that the marketplace doesn't have to be totally based on the coercive power of consumers to determine what products will be offered. Rather, by buying

fair trade items these young shoppers are offered the chance to let their purchasing activity persuade others that one can be an ethical consumer.

But as admirable as these efforts at thoughtful and justice-conscious purchasing may be, do they really make a lasting impact on young people? After all, they still send the message that we need more “stuff”—that satisfaction comes from our power to buy. What if instead we helped teens to let go of what they already have? What if we helped free them from the enculturated desire to buy more and more and instead encouraged them to seek fulfillment and meaning beyond the accumulation of things?

To engage teens in an exploration of a theology of enough, invite them to take some time to sit alone and create as long a list as possible of the things that they own. After several minutes, ask them to reflect on the following questions:

How do the things on your list connect you to people in other parts of the world?

How many things on your list do you need in order to have enough?

How many things on your list do you rarely use?

How many things on your list could be more useful to someone else?

How many things on your list would you be willing to give away?

Next, challenge them to explore a variety of scripture texts that look at how possessions affect our interactions with others and our relationship with God and God’s relationship with us: Luke 12: 13-21 (The Parable of the Rich Fool); Luke 21: 1-4 (The Widow’s Mite); Matthew 19: 16-21 (The Rich Young Man). If working with a group, I might suggest they internalize these passages by acting them out together or rewriting them into a contemporary context.

Reflect with your youth on these texts by discussing how the gospel writers depict Jesus teaching about our fixation on money and material goods more than any other topic. Jesus is remembered as someone who clearly felt that how we view the importance of possessions in our lives has a real impact on our relationship with God. He is remembered as a poor man living in a world where most people were so poor that they only had the food they needed to live day-to-day and he is remembered as teaching people to be careful thinking that having “things” would bring happiness.

Next, return to the scripture texts and ask: What character(s)

are you most like right now when it comes to the possessions in your life? How do you see the characters’ possessions encouraging or getting in the way of their relationship with God? How might their attitudes about possessions actually hinder or help God’s activity in the world? In the same way, how do our own consumerist activities help or hinder God?

Remind teens how Jesus often taught that in order to participate in God’s mission we may have to let go of some of the clutter in our lives. In this way, we allow God to move within us and we free God to be more fully present within the world. Conclude by inviting the youth to brainstorm ideas for simplifying their own lives, such as giving up unneeded possessions,

According to the study, most teens say they are grateful for what they already have and are less likely than they might have been just a few years ago to ask for things they really don’t need. The majority in the survey reported appreciating what they already receive from their families and acknowledge the need to better understand how debt affects themselves and others.

taking a fast from consumerist activities, or keeping a journal in which they write daily about the things already in their lives for which they are thankful. Through these types of intentional activities, teens can develop a more missional understanding of the ways in which all their activity in the marketplace has the potential to allow God to work through them to ensure that all in the world have enough.

BRIAN KIRK is an ordained pastor in The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He serves an urban church in St. Louis, Missouri and is adjunct faculty at Eden Theological Seminary. Brian is co-author of the blog Rethinkingyouthministry.com and of the new text [Missional Youth Ministry: Moving from Gathering Teenagers to Scattering Disciples](#).

A Sermon

by SALLIE MCFAGUE

Preached at Epiphany Chapel Vancouver School of Theology, November 20, 2008

Texts: Psalm 19; Phil. 2: 1-8; Mark 6: 7-12



I am teaching a course this semester on spiritual autobiography. I have taught it many times; in fact, it may be the first course I taught almost 40 years ago. It is about folks like Teresa of Avila, John Woolman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Simone Weil, Mohandas Gandhi, Jean Vanier, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Dorothy Day, people who live lives of extraordinary love for others, especially the weak and vulnerable. I always find new insights teaching the course and this year is no exception. I have been struck by a characteristic shared by many of them, the rather shocking practice of self-emptying, of what the Christian tradition has called “kenosis.” The text from Philippians sums it up well: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” What an inversion this is of triumphal, imperialistic views of Christianity!

The reason I am struck by self-emptying is because I believe it suggests an ethic for our time, a time that is characterized by climate change and financial chaos. These two related crises are the result of excess, our insatiable appetites that are literally consuming the world. We are debtors twice over—financially and ecologically. The very habits that are causing the financial crisis are also destroying the planet. We are living way beyond our means at all levels: our personal credit cards, the practices of the financial lending institutions, and the planet’s resources that support all of us.

Could the crazy notion of self-emptying, a notion found in different forms in many religious traditions, be a clue to what is wrong with our way of being in the world as well as a suggestion of how we might live differently? Whether in Buddhism’s release from desire by non-attachment or Christianity’s admonition that to find one’s life one must lose it, religions are often counter-cultural in their various ethics of self-denial in order that genuine fulfillment might occur. While in some

religious traditions, such self-denial moves into asceticism and life-denial, this is not usually the underlying assumption.

I am thinking of John Woolman, an 18th century American Quaker, who had a successful retail business and gave it up because he felt it kept him from seeing clearly something that disturbed him: slavery. He came to see how money stood in the way of clear perception of injustice: people who had a lot of property and land needed slaves to maintain them (or so these folks reasoned). He saw the same problem with his own reasoning—he said his “eye” was not single because whenever he looked at an injustice in the world he always saw it through his own eye, his own situation and benefit. It was as if he had double-vision. If he was able to move himself out of the center, then his eye became “single.” Once he reduced his own level of prosperity, he could see the clear links between riches and oppression. He wrote: “Every degree of luxury has some connection with evil” (*The Journal of John Woolman and A Plea for the Poor* [NY: Corinth Books, 1961], 46). Reduction of his life-style gave him insight into the difference between “needs” and “wants,” something our insatiable consumer culture has made it almost impossible to recognize. As an ethic for a time of climate change, Woolman suggests the clarity of perception into others “needs” that can come about through the reduction of one’s own “wants.”

However, Woolman did not find such self-emptying negative or depressing; rather, he found it fulfilling. He has a dream in which he hears the words “John Woolman is dead” and realizes that now his own will is dead he can say with Paul that he is crucified with Christ, that Christ might live in him. We find ourselves by losing ourselves. That deeper desire is the desire for God, for nothing less will fill the hunger in us. Augustine says that we are drawn to God as a sheep is drawn to a leafy branch or a child to a handful of nuts. To empty the self is not an act of denial, but of fulfillment, for it creates space for God to fill one’s being. For Woolman, we are satisfied by nothing less than God; our deepest desire is to be one with God, even as Jesus was. Made in the image of God, our destiny is to become

one with God, so that we too can say, not my will but God's be done. This is not a loss, but a gain, the greatest gain.

What we see here is not an ascetic call for self-denial to purify ourselves or even a moral injunction to give others space to live; rather, it is more basic. It is an invitation to imitate the way God loves the world. In the Christian tradition, "kenosis" or self-emptying is a way of understanding God's actions in creation, the incarnation, and the cross. In creation, God limits the divine self, pulling in, so to speak, to allow space for others to exist. God, who is the one in whom we live and move and have our being, does not take all the space but gives space and life to others. This is an inversion of the usual understanding of power as control; instead, power is given to others to live as diverse and valuable creatures. In the incarnation, as Paul writes in Phil. 2:7, God "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave," substituting humility and vulnerability for our insatiable appetites. In the cross God gives of the divine self without limit to side with the poor and the oppressed. God does not take the way of the victor, but like Jesus and the temptations, rejects absolute power and imperialism for a different way. Therefore, Christian discipleship becomes a "cruciform" life, imitating the self-giving of Christ for others.

Another example of kenotic living is the case of the French philosopher and unbaptized Catholic Simone Weil. She lived a radical and brief life of solidarity with her poorest and often starving fellow citizens during World War II. She practiced what she called "de-creation," a form of self-emptying in which she sees herself diminish as God grows in her. De-creation or the death of the will is giving up control over one's life, so that God can subvert the self's exorbitant and constantly growing desires. The point is not mortification but a discipline of emptying herself so that God can be all in all. To eat when and what one wants when others are starving is a symbol of control over finitude, of exceptionalism, which she refused to embrace. Food is a symbol of basic physical limits and unless we can limit our own voracious appetites, we will not be able to attend to the hunger in others—their abject suffering, both physical and emotional. Our tendency is to love others because of our needs, not theirs, our hunger, not their hunger. Our fat,

relentless egos want more, more, more: the insatiability of the consumer culture which has resulted in climate change and more recently in financial collapse.

Simone Weil says that human beings are naturally "cannibalistic": we eat instead of looking, we devour rather than paying attention, we consume other people and the planet in our search for self-fulfillment. Augustine claimed something similar in his understanding of sin: voracious, lustful desire to have it all for oneself. From the 21st century ecological perspective, sin is refusing to share, refusing to live in such a way that others—other people and other life-forms—can also live. For us in our time, sin is refusing to live justly and sustainably with all others on our planet. It is refusing to share the banquet of life.

This is not a new understanding of sin; rather, it is built upon the traditional view that, as Augustine puts it, sin is "being curved in upon oneself" rather than being open to God. In our ecological age, we now see that "being open to God" means being open

to the other creatures, upon whom we depend and who depend upon us. We cannot love God unless we love God's world. Christians have always known this because an incarnate God is a world-loving God, but now it takes on new meaning and depth as we realize the radical interrelationship and interdependence of all forms of life.

As with Woolman, the problem as Weil understands it is the inability to really see others. She writes: "The only people who have any hope of salvation are those who occasionally stop and look for a time, instead of eating" (*Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd [NY: Harper and Row, 1951], 286). The United Nations Earth Charter, a document which lays out principles for a just, sustainable planet agrees. Its first principle reads: "Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings." An ethic of self-emptying begins with the recognition that something besides oneself really exists and needs the basics of existence.

Paying attention to others, looking not eating, is a somber, thoughtful ethic for our time of climate change. Put simply, climate change is the result of too many human beings using too much energy and taking up too much space on the planet.

We are debtors twice over—financially and ecologically. The very habits that are causing the financial crisis are also destroying the planet. We are living way beyond our means at all levels: our personal credit cards, the practices of the financial lending institutions, and the planet's resources that support all of us.

“Environmentalism” is not simply about maintaining green spaces in cities or national parks; rather, it is the more basic issue of energy use on a finite planet. Thus, space and energy, the basic physical needs of all creatures—a place to live and the energy to sustain life day by day—is the issue. In other words, the crisis facing us is one of geography, one of space and place and habitability. It is not about time and history and human meaning; rather, it is physical, earthly, worldly, fleshly—the basics of existence. Christianity has often focused on time, history, and human meaning; for example, salvation has been understood to be eternal existence in another world for individual human beings. But an “incarnational” Christianity, a Christianity that believes in an incarnate God who loves the world and inhabits the world, is radically mundane. In Irenaeus’s wonderful words: “The glory of God is every creature fully alive.”

This is a strange “crisis” to face: it does not have the immediacy of a war or plague or tsunami. Rather, it has to be with “how we live” on a daily basis—the food we eat, the transportation we use, the size of the house we live in, the consumer goods we buy, the luxuries we allow ourselves, the amount of long distance air travel we permit ourselves, and so forth. We are not being called to take up arms and fight an enemy; rather, the enemy is the very ordinary life we ourselves are leading as well-off North Americans. And yet, for all its presumed innocence, this way of life, multiplied by billions of people, is both unjust to those who cannot attain this lifestyle and destructive of the very planet that supports us all

A very different form of life is suggested by another extraordinary Christian. Dorothy Day, who identified totally with the abject poverty of people in the ghettos of NYC during the Great Depression, lived a life of joyful sharing, a form of the abundant life totally contrary to our consumer understanding. If Woolman and Weil belong to the prophetic strain in Christianity, the strain that underscores the way to God through self-emptying, Day belongs to the sacramental path that while acknowledging self-emptying, revels in the fulfillment that follows. She found the abundant life in voluntary poverty: she did indeed find her life by losing it, and it was a rich, full, joyful life. In the Postscript to her autobiography, she writes of her community:

“We were just sitting there talking when lines of people began to form, saying, ‘We need bread.’ We could not say, ‘Go, be thou filled.’ If there were six small loaves and a few fishes, we had to divide them. There was always bread . . . There is always room for one more; each of us will have a little less . . . We cannot love

God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know Him in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone any more. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with

We cannot love God unless we love God’s world. Christians have always known this because an incarnate God is a world-loving God, but now it takes on new meaning and depth as we realize the radical interrelationship and interdependence of all

a crust, where there is companionship” (*The Long Loneliness* [NY: Harper and Row, 1952, 317-18]).

The kenotic paradigm in Woolman, Weil, and Day is not for the sake of asceticism or self-flagellation. It is not a negative statement about the earth and life; rather, it is the recognition that life’s flourishing on earth demands certain limitations and sacrifices at physical and emotional levels. The ego that demands everything for itself—honor, power, money—is the same cannibalistic self that devours all the food and land. As St. Francis well knew, “possessionlessness” is a matter of the spirit and the body: it demands not only giving up some of one’s possessions but also one’s claim of exceptionalism. While the self-emptying pattern might have been seen in other times as a peculiarly religious way of being in the world, I think we can now see how it might be the germ of a personal, professional, and public ethic for the 21st century.

What characterizes our time is two things: first, an awareness of our radical interdependence on all other life-forms—as well as on the vital climatic system of our planet—and second, an increasing appreciation of the planet’s finitude and vulnerability. These realities of our time mean that the vocabulary and sensibility of self-limitation, ego-lessness, sharing, giving space to others, and limiting our energy use, no longer sounds like a special language for the saints, but rather, as an ethic for all of us. The religions may be the greatest “realists,” with their intuitive appreciation for self-emptying and self-limitation as a way not only to personal fulfillment but also to sane planetary practice. Could it be that the religions might take the lead in exploring and illustrating how an ethic of self-limitation might function in light of the 21st century crisis of climate change? The banquet of which Dorothy Day speaks—the banquet of heaven and the banquet of earth—is an inclusive feast. As she writes of it: “There is always room for one more; each of us will have a little less.”

a theology of ENOUGH time: the important message from ecclesiastes for today

by BRIAN BRANDSMEIER



In the book of Ecclesiastes, the author is dealing with the question of “the meaning of life.”

Obviously, this is a deep thought. The author is an elder who is reflecting back upon her life through a journal. In this biblical journal, she shares some of the mistakes of her past, namely, looking for a magic

panacea for easy happiness in life.

First, the elder thought scholarly knowledge would be the panacea, but she learned that knowledge is only moderately important (Ecclesiastes 1:18, 2:13). In the end, it doesn't lead her to any deeper level of happiness than anyone else.

Second, the elder thought material things would be the panacea, but she learned these things are only moderately important (Ecclesiastes 2:1-9). People with a lot of stuff still experience similar joys and pains as others.

Third, the elder thought the conventional wisdom of “what goes around, comes around” was the panacea, but learned that life is far more complex than that (Ecclesiastes 2:24-26). Bad things happen to good people. And good things happen to bad people. Real life is not so simple.

After the elder exhausted her search for a magical panacea, she finally submits to a sense of balance in the complexity of life (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). And she realizes that “for everything there is a season” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

In the end, the elder comes to the conclusion that the goal of life should be about embracing life as it comes, instead of seeking a magic path to easy happiness. Life is about living the best life possible in each changing moment, trusting that the tough times will pass; and soaking up the good times for all they are worth. Therefore we are challenged to seek balance in life, all-the-while being prepared for the extremes of good and ill. There is a time to build up, a time to break down. A time to dance, a time to mourn. And so on. All of us are on different places along these spectrums. Some of us are dancing. Some of us are mourning. Some of us are somewhere in-between. And that's how real life happens. Life shifts and changes. The key is to find balance amid the change.

The elder also reminds us that balance should be applied in our stewardship of time. At the end of her life, she suggests neither a self-destructive slothful life nor a frenetic life of toil (Ecclesiastes 4:5-6). Or to tie in a familiar Gospel story, we need to find a balance between Mary *and* Martha (Luke 10:38-42). Balance is important for the elder in Ecclesiastes.

One of the major mistakes that the elder confesses, as she reflects upon her life, is that she spent more time chasing the wind than living her life. In other words, she perused the end of the road and forgot to live life on the journey. The only real panacea, in the end, is simply living life to the fullest in the present moment. But that's easier said than done. Obviously this was even a problem 4,000 years ago when this text was written. And that was before computers, iPhones, and even pagers!

Life can be busy and stressful. We're constantly rushing from one thing to the next. Our jobs, meetings, commutes, house work, cell phones, etc. all rush us along. Capitalism tells us that we're good citizens only when our daily planners set the rhythm of our lives. The Protestant Work Ethic tells us that we're good Protestants only when we're constantly doing something productive. Even Progressive Christianity tells us that we're good Christians only if we're selflessly sacrificing our time and life, like Jesus. Or, at least some descriptions of Jesus. All of these things form us into super busy people who forget about the

importance of fun, Sabbath, solitude, recreation, family time, golf, etc. And that is why we need teachers like the author of Ecclesiastes to invite us out of that onslaught of business.

Morrie Schwartz was an elder who reflected back on his life as he was dying from ALS. He had this to say about the business of life: “The culture doesn’t encourage us to think about things until we’re about to die. We wrapped up with many things in life—career, family, having enough money, meeting the mortgage, getting a new car, fixing the radiator when it breaks, etc. We are involved in trillions of little acts just to keep going. So we don’t get into the habit of standing back and looking at our lives and saying: Is this all? Is this what I want? Is something missing?”

Asking these kinds of questions helps bring us into mindfulness of the here and now. Mindfulness is a way of being awake, resting in our awareness, and soaking every ounce of joy that we can. Both Morrie Schwartz and the author of Ecclesiastes came to this understanding in life. But not until they faced death. And that’s how it usually happens. It takes a frightening

Mindfulness is a way of being awake, resting in our awareness, and soaking every ounce of joy that we can.

phone call early in the morning – or late at night. It takes a diagnosis from a doctor. It takes the death of a friend. It takes these kinds of events to draw us out of the frenetic business of life, and draw us into a deeper mindfulness of life.

Mindfulness is where we soak up life, take back our time, reprioritize things, and live life as though our lives deeply matter. Mindfulness is about being a human being, not a human doing. It’s where we truly appreciate each moment of life for what it is. And this mindfulness stuff has been shown to increase mental and physical health.

Life is too short and precious to rush through it. It should be enjoyed and lived to the fullest. The author of Ecclesiastes wrote that “it is God’s gift that all people should eat, drink, and take pleasure in their life” (Ecclesiastes 3:13). The goal of life, according to this elder, is simply to appreciate life as much as possible despite its complexity and brevity. In fact, the elder seems to be telling her readers that life should be appreciated all the more and lived more fully because it’s short. Again, she reiterates this as she gives advice to her readers: “This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and

find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot” (Ecclesiastes 5:18). Life should be soaked up.

Finally the author of Ecclesiastes gives us a commissioning statement: “Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do. Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the people whom you love” (Ecclesiastes 9:7-9a). That’s it. That’s all. That is the ultimate point that she wanted to share. Go enjoy your life!

Alanis Morissette’s song, “Incomplete,” is a powerful song about living life to the fullest in the present moment. The song begins by talking about a list of things Alanis wants to do “one day” (when she has enough time), such as being a good friend and developing a closer relationship with God. Then the chorus of the song is about realizing that she has been rushing toward the finish line of life without making the time to do the things she really wants to do in life. In the end, Alanis realized that she’d been “missing the rapture this whole time,” so she decided to live more fully in the present moment with God, friends, peace, etc. In the end, this song is about discovering that life is now or never. When our culture tries to tell us that we don’t have time right now, we need to remind ourselves that this is the only time that matters.

Now is the time. Now is the *only time*. If we want to seek a closer relationship with God, let’s do it now. If we want to be faith-filled, let’s do it now. If we want to find peace, let’s do it now. If we want to enjoy our family, let’s do it now. If we want to have fun, let’s do it now. If we want to seek wholeness, let’s do it now. If we want to appreciate life more mindfully, let’s do it now. Every moment is a sacred moment—a sacred “now”—drenched in divine possibility.

Life is sacred. Soak it up for all it’s worth!

Preached at Faith United Church of Christ in Iowa City, Iowa, July 11, 2010. Text: Ecclesiastes 9:1-9. This sermon was inspired in part by a lecture by Rabbi Howard Kaplansky of United Hebrew Congregation, St. Louis, MO.

Works cited

Albom, Mitch. *Tuesdays With Morrie*. Broadway Books: New York, 1997. 64-65.

BRIAN BRANDSMEIER graduated from Luther College and Eden Theological Seminary. Currently, he is a clergyperson, blogger, and songwriter in Iowa. Brian is interested in the expression of process theologies through liturgy, music, and ethics. His blog can be found at <ephphatha-poetry.blogspot.com>.

Brown, continued from page 9

absence of usurious lending practices.¹⁵ Rather than having to borrow the moneylenders' gold, the people relied largely on interest-free tallies. Unlike gold, wooden tallies could not become scarce; and unlike paper money, they could not be counterfeited or multiplied by sleight of hand. They were simply a unit of measure, a tally of goods and services exchanged. The tally system avoided both the depressions resulting from a scarcity of gold and the inflations resulting from printing paper money out of all proportion to the goods and services available for sale. Since the tallies came into existence *along with* goods and services, supply and demand increased together, and prices remained stable. The tally system provided an organic form of money that expanded naturally as trade expanded and contracted naturally as taxes were paid. Bankers did not have to meet behind closed doors to set interest rates and manipulate markets to keep the money supply in balance. It balanced the way a checkbook balances,

Gray, continued from page 23

Life is luminous with meaning.
The mystery lights up
the ordinary
and makes it the doorway
into a deeper experience
of awe and wonder
at the miracle of living.

“To go rightly in this world is to be free.” And it is just possible that “to go rightly in this world” is to be—wealthy!

Endnotes

1. In the agricultural economy of Jesus' day, to own land and to own what could be grown on that land was to be rich.
2. *Man's Impact on the Global Environment* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1970) and *Inadvertent Climate Modification: Report of the Study of Man's Impact on Climate* (MIT, 1971).

Shen, continued from page 43

therefore, common human experience is the best testing ground for the truth of religious and political claims (11). Gamwell's understanding of the common human experience is central to his treatment of contentious issues, such as abortion. Though Gamwell's commitment to common human experience is admirable, it stands in tension with his affirmation of a close relationship between religion and politics, because any comprehensive religious ideal inevitably influences how people understand what constitutes the “common human experience.” Therefore, it is unclear whether the appeal to common human experience really does resolve controversial political issues.

In all, *By the People for the People* provides a valuable resource for progressive Christians to explore contentious political is-

as a matter of simple math. The system of government-issued tallies kept the British economy stable and thriving until the mid-seventeenth century, when Oliver Cromwell needed money to fund a revolt against the Tudor monarchy . . .

Endnote

1. See Deuteronomy (New World Translation)—15:6 [Y]ou will certainly lend on pledge to many nations, whereas you yourself will not borrow; and you must dominate over many nations, whereas over you they will not dominate. 23:19 You must not make your brother pay interest . . . 23:20 You may make a foreigner pay interest, but your brother you must not make pay interest.

ELLEN BROWN is an attorney, president of the Public Banking Institute., and a *HuffPost* contributor. She has written eleven books, including [Web of Debt: The Shocking Truth About Our Money System and How We Can Break Free.](#)

3. Bill Clinton, *Giving: How Each of Us Can Change the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).
4. *Women Respond to the Men's Movement: A Feminist Collection*, ed. Kay Leigh Hagan (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).
5. L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz* (Chicago: George M. Hill Co., 1900; film, 1939)
6. See Elizabeth Dodson Gray, *Green Paradise Lost* (Wellesley, Mass.: Roundtable Press, 1979).
7. Sam Keen, *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man* (New York: Bantam, 1991).

ELIZABETH DODSON GRAY is an author and lecturer on ecofeminism. She recently celebrated her retirement after 32 years of leadership of the *Theological Opportunities Program*, a lecture series that began at the Harvard Divinity School.

Copyright © 2011 by Elizabeth Dodson Gray. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

sues intelligently with an accessible bibliography for deeper exploration, and its bold and articulate style makes it a pleasure to read. Furthermore, Gamwell's interdisciplinary approach to this concise volume offers a variety of insights on how to look at particular issues from multiple angles: legal, theological, and philosophical. For any progressive Christian passionate about politics, I recommend this book as a helpful companion to understanding the role of faith in the public sphere.

YI SHEN MA is a first year MA student at Claremont School of Theology. His research interests include ethics, political theory, and postcolonial liberation thoughts. He also served in the United States Navy as a religious program specialist.

about the artist

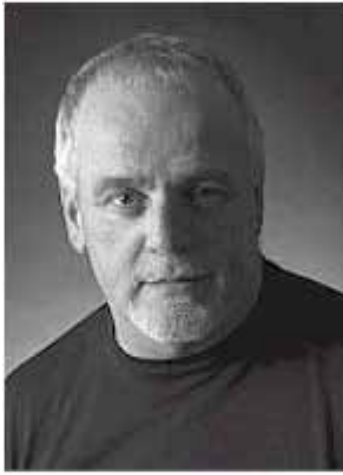


photo by David Spencer

The cover art is by painter, printmaker and sculptor [Paul Crimi](#). His prolific body of work encompasses realism, impressionism, abstraction and expressionism. Since studying at the School of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Paul has been widely exhibited throughout the east coast of the United States. Passionately spiritual, Crimi produces illuminating religious tributes that are widely collected by people of all faiths and have been published in religious periodicals nationwide. Writes Crimi:

My work, since 1996, gives witness to an inner reflection of a true spiritual conversion, outwardly manifested is a positive expression of the power in the revelation of Jesus Christ. When I'm creating a piece, whether it's a drawing, a painting, or a print, it's a way for me to contemplate my blessings. I characterize each and every one of my works as a visual prayer.

I openly share my religious experience with others in my work. Visual prayer, for me, grows naturally and is projected spontaneously from within, taking an original form. I want viewers to rejoice with me in the witnessing of the power and grace of God, which is in all of us.

I create positive statements in my works as I invite viewers to return to an imaginative, child-like simplicity and to experience greater spiritual understanding and awareness. Responsive art must go beyond the technology of projected images and photo magic. It must come from deep within the soul of the artist to transcend time and space and to become 'I am.'

Note: We acknowledge with gratitude permission from Paul Crimi to use his art on our cover. Readers are encouraged to check out beautiful artwork at his website: <paulcrimifinearts.com>.

a process hymn *God of Movement*

by SARA KAY

God of Movement, work inside us;
Send your rain and nurture us all,
Tend our roots and hearts; excite us
Help us hear your ancient call
In our pain and in our laughter
Present, ever, throughout all our days
Here before and now and after
May all living things give praise

As a tiny seed is planted,
Roots emerge and growth begins.
So we ask, our hearts enchant, and
Bring your Kin-dom forth from within.
Love unquenchable, hope unstoppable,
Reign of justice with no end
Use our lives and make it possible
That your garden, we may tend.

Send us forth to sow and scatter
Seeds that grow your Kin-dom on earth.
Make it clear the ways that matter,
Those which bring new life and new birth.
Through your people, bring your healing,
In our lives and the fruits that we grow.
Ever more, your Kin-dom, revealing,
Now's the time to plant and sow.

TUNE: HYFRYDOL

TEXTS: MARK 4:1-9; 4:26-32

Check out Sara' Kay's CD, "On the Way," [here](#).

Critics corner: BOOKS

Hope for Tomorrow's Families: A Model that Values Variety

James R. Jacobson (New York: Strategic Book Publishing, 2009).

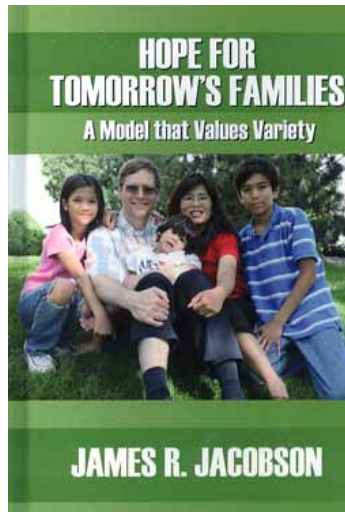
reviewed by Jeanyne B. Slettom

“In many families we still have piston engine parents dealing with jet-age children” (7). With observations like these, Dr. Jacobson, a retired United Methodist minister and family counselor, urges parents, grandparents, and teachers to recognize that child-rearing methods of the past, based on an authoritarian model, are inadequate to the present needs of children. Applying the modern-postmodern paradigm, Jacobson argues that parenting needs new images consistent with the world not as machine but as organism, and nature not as hierarchical but as interconnected and interdependent.

In clear and readable prose, Jacobson describes traditional and permissive parenting styles, then contrasts them both with what he calls persuasive-relational parenting. In this family structure, power is persuasive, not coercive or permissive, and the objective is positive empowerment of the child. The importance of this point for parenting derives from the obvious importance of the family for imparting values and positive self-image to children.

Writes Jacobson, “The future will be determined by how we empower one another in the family by offering hope, help, and healing through family relationships” (56). And it must be through the family: “The values of relationships, inclusiveness, equality, respect, sharing, and love cannot be imposed by any government. They are values that are developed in children as they grow. In a real sense, these values are caught, not taught” (58).

Jacobson’s perspective as a process theologian is evident in his argument that to save our families, we must change our image of God. The image of an absolute deity feeds into and is used to justify an authoritarian parenting style: “We cannot enter the new world as long as we hold on to an authoritarian God . . . the image of an absolute deity who cannot respond to us with love often lets us think this way in parent-child relationships. A relational vision of God and the world gets us beyond



this power struggle and lets us think of God as friend and companion. This vision would influence our relationship with our children and with everyone else” (65).

Jacobson describes his vision of relational parenting as based on functional authority—that is, authority that functions to empower and protect. “Functional authority is the authority one has because of the ability, knowledge, or resource one has that is helpful to another” (68). This style of parenting focuses on consequences rather than punishment, on healthy communication rather than motivation by guilt, and a healthy sexuality that celebrates diversity in family members as God-given. It reinforces core values, such as free-

dom, responsibility, love and approval, religion, commitment, relationships, justice, respect, a sense of worth, and empowerment. It recognizes and values the extraordinary diversity in today’s families, and it calls us to participation.

Jacobson’s work calls to mind Whitehead’s fallacy of simple location, which states that nothing can be understood apart from its relationships. Applied to the family, it encourages us to consider what we might call the fallacy of the nuclear family. Jacobson doesn’t put it like that—the book is wonderfully clear of jargon—but he makes the point in his conclusion. We need a new model for parenting; yes, but for the sake of healthy families, we also need new models for religion, the workplace, and education. But if that seems too daunting, Jacobson reminds us the “hope for our families is in each of us, not outside of us” (136). The importance, then, is in what we decide to do every day, for “the reality of each of us extends beyond a lifetime and becomes part of the thread out of which the future is woven . . . We become part of hope for the future when we give ourselves to the present moment. . . . “Hope for tomorrow’s families happens when we live in a way that models unity, inclusiveness, and compassion in our family relationships and enables us to reach out to the world in love ” (138).

By the People, for the People: A Political Voice for Progressive Christians,
by Franklin I. Gamwell (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010).

reviewed by YI SHEN MA

Here is a timely and accessible resource for progressive Christians who are wrestling with issues related to the role of faith in politics. As an intellectual leader of the organization Protestants for the Common Good (PCG), Gamwell boldly takes on many controversial issues that have divided Christians in American politics. Among these issues are the relationship between religion and the state, abortion, same-sex marriage, affirmative action, and economic inequality. The book is neatly divided into four parts. In part one, Gamwell deals with the relationship between Christian theology and politics. Part two argues that the common good is the true Christian political ideal. In part three, Gamwell discusses contemporary political issues, and in part four he presents the official political statements of PCG.

The thread that connects all of Gamwell's discussion is the belief that "Christian faith includes a vision for the human community and the common good profoundly at odds with certain alternative ideals widely influential in recent United States politics" (3). Gamwell advocates that each member of a society should simultaneously be "the beneficiary and the benefactor of others," because God's will for the flourishing of all human beings depends on an ethic of mutuality (13). For Gamwell, the political implications of Christianity contradict other prominent political ideologies. According to Gamwell, two popular political values are particularly disturbing: "the supremacy of private interest" and "the supremacy of private virtue" (26). Gamwell believes while many liberals mistake the goal of society to be the fulfillment of individual wants, conservatives focus on private virtues and morality, without much concern for the wellbeing of the society. For Gamwell, both positions are at odds with the common good, which is the true Christian political ideal, as reflected in the teachings of Jesus. In developing the idea of the common good, Gamwell proposes potential solutions to current political problems.



One of the most intriguing aspects of the book is Gamwell's unique understanding of the relationship between religion and politics. Gamwell criticizes both the complete separation and the mixing of religion and politics. Instead, Gamwell advocates an alternative position, in which religious faiths are the overarching guiding principle for political ideals. However, Gamwell neglects to explain how this novel proposal can work practically. In a Jeffersonian way, Gamwell supports the public contestation of differing religious ideals, because he believes mutual critiques help eliminate falsehoods. Gamwell assumes a natural and positive relationship between politics and religion because he believes political and communal ideals are fundamentally religious. He describes

religious belief as "conviction about what makes human life ultimately worth living" (43). Therefore, Gamwell insists, religious freedom is also freedom for citizens of democracies to choose for themselves the ideal community. For Gamwell, God's all-inclusive love must translate into reality through the universal concern for the common good (37).

The best way to realize the common good, Gamwell argues, is through democratic political contestations of differing ideals among equal citizens, because the truth of any substantive ideals of justice can be tested "by appeal to common human experience" (11). Gamwell's appeal to common human experience has a strong affinity with John Rawls' "public reason," the idea that convincing political arguments can be made only if the justifications given be shared among all reasonable people regardless of religious commitments. Gamwell acknowledges that publicly challenging ultimate ideals may seem antithetical to the nature of religious belief; however, he assures his Christian readers that the appeal to common human experience is entirely consistent with Christian belief. For Gamwell, God works in different ways in different people, and the "desire to live in the truth is the deepest and abiding human affection";

Shen, continued on page 40

**"Sara Kay's music uplifts and transforms.
It is mystical and missional..."**

- Bruce Epperly



**"Sara Kay sings with mind, heart, and
soul. It's rousing, emergent music..."**

- Philip Clayton

January 13-16, 2012

11th annual
WHITEHEADinternational
film**FESTIVAL**



celebrating films that promote
the common good

Faith & Film
CLASS
with
Marjorie
Suchocki