

Perhaps all of us who have ears for listening should attune our hearts and minds on care for creation as an inevitable truth that our Garden of Eden was made manifest before humanity, and that we are dependent on the health and vitality of the soil. We are called to live a sacramental, organic, intentional life. Native Americans share their wisdom for us on the sacred nature of creation and that we are all connected; as their wisdom tells us: a frog will not drink up its pond. Pray we all listen with the ear of our heart.

Deeper Green Churches

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That the arc of creation does not match the arc of redemption is a big problem in Christianity.

—Larry Rasmussen

This sentence from Larry Rasmussen is a poignant and concise diagnosis of the ongoing disconnect between the life of the Christian church and the unfolding global ecological crisis.¹ Despite decades of hard work, stacks of data, and passionate pleas from scientists, church members, and advocacy groups, the church remains barely moved by the injustices and spiritual disconnects that environmental issues such as pollution, collapsing ecosystems, and climate change bring to her altars. For most churches, these challenges remain little more than a line item on a long list of stewardship and social issues spread across the church's various ministries.

¹Larry Rasmussen, in a speech delivered at the Festival of Faiths, Louisville, Kentucky, 2010, reflecting Joseph's Sittler's call for continuity of nature and grace decades before. This disconnect between how the Christian salvation story is commonly told and more recent understandings of our 14.5 billion year-old universe is a problem not just for the environment, but also underlies such controversies as the creationism/evolution debate, millennialism, and many other issues.

“Creation Care” may perhaps be granted a committee with a small budget line and a Sunday service each year to celebrate and make its case, but its palpable presence at the altar, in the classrooms, and at the fellowship goes wanting.

To those Christians working closely with environmental issues, this situation feels like a serious disconnect between the magnitude of the issue and the depth of response. For many church leaders, on the other hand, a wall remains between environmental movements as they have experienced them and the life of the church. To them, environmental issues are controversial issues that belong to politicians and advocacy groups and not to the daily life of the parish. The buzz of environmental activity feels like a recruiting effort of secular environmental activists to exploit the church as a ready-made pool of recruits. Or, the issue is simply listed as one form of injustice among many or on a to-do for the buildings and grounds committee.

But this apparent disconnect is not a concern for the environmentally motivated only. Church leaders struggle with lukewarm Christian discipleship among members and look for ways to move them beyond the busyness and distraction of a consumeristic lifestyle. There is a common denominator between environmental inertia and spiritual inertia. Busyness and distraction underlie both. Separation from the wider community of love and life underlie both. The opportunity for both environmental health and church vitality is to connect the one to the other.

Here lies a door to a conversation sorely needed in the church. Why this talk of the environment within the walls of

the church? Where is the Christian faith in these concerns? What do these issues have to do with the gospel? Is now the time for these priorities? These questions are important for both those concerned about the environment and those concerned about church vitality. Rightly framed, they cut to the heart of the role of the church in the world and its message and mission. The challenge of environmental collapse invites something deeper than advocacy in the name of justice or behavior modifications in the name of stewardship. This is not only about the future of the environment. This is also about the future of the church.²

So how can those concerned for the environment and those concerned for church vitality come to a common table? Most agree that good stewardship of buildings and grounds, energy efficiency, recycling and the like are wise and helpful things for the church to be doing. Most would agree that the environmental crisis is at least partially a sign of poor stewardship, and that poor stewardship should be corrected with good stewardship. Many will also agree that environmental exploitation that adversely impacts the lives of poor people should be challenged by the church’s prophetic voice. But these agreements fall short in that they frame the issue as one of material mismanagement. And these frameworks, while providing some traction within the church, also keep it from

²Luke Timothy Johnson calls this problem “a crisis in Christian identity.” He writes, “Indeed, material exploitation and despoliation are far more the result of attitudes that have developed in opposition to classical Christian tenets”; Luke Timothy Johnson, “Caring for the Earth: Why Environmentalism Needs Theology,” *Commonweal* 132, (13 July 15, 2005): 18.

having a deeper and most central place in the church's life—its sacramental life of worship, prayer, fellowship, evangelism, and mission. They fail to establish environmental issues deeply within the traditionally central concerns and work of the church as church: holiness, justice, fellowship, worship, and salvation.

Willis Jenkins has noted a similar mismatch between the sacred and the secular among environmental voices in religious circles. While secular environmental writers wax spiritual and poetical in their efforts to express the beauty of the natural world and their sorrow over its destruction, religious writers build their cases primarily upon the factual and the scientific:

Other cultural observers have noticed this spiritual creep in the environmental thought and trace religious valences in American environmentalism, sometimes with dismay. The veneration of nature, the feeling of prophetic alienation, the raptures and epiphanies, the sense of apocalyptic doom, the missional project of personal and cultural transformation—all this makes the environmental movement look religious. Meanwhile, the religious are beginning to look environmental.³

In the trenches of church work, this odd transposition of sacred and secular has filtered down into the daily work of environmental ministry. “Green team” members trot out facts and figures and host documentaries created by those from the scientific and political battlefield. They organize the use

³Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9.

of fair-trade coffee and washable dishes in efforts to raise awareness and align behavior with information. Meanwhile, the sacramental and teaching life of the church remains unchanged and the efforts appear shallow and disconnected to those looking on. This view may partially result from people in churches who care most about environmental issues understanding which arenas of church life are available for influence (stewardship and justice) and which are kept out of reach (worship, liturgy, theology, and gospel). Environmental ministry, evangelism, and spiritual formation all suffer from the disconnections.

This reality illustrates the problem. Those arenas kept out of reach are often kept so because they are the most central and sacred within the life of the church. As such they remain the purview of the clergy and the most established of church members. But these are the very arenas where the work can best be done to establish a faith deep and broad enough to make sense of the wider ecology and the human place in it. These are the places where the people of God can learn to pray along with Teilhard de Chardin:

Shatter, my God, through the daring of your revelation the childishly timid outlook that can conceive of nothing greater or more vital in the world than the pitiable perfection of our human organism.⁴

⁴Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “The Mass on the World,” in his *Hymn of the Universe* (London: William Collins Sons; New York, Harper & Row, 1965), 25.

A Need for a Deeper Green

So what can more deeply connect the ecological crisis with the life of the church? What sort of frame will help move these issues from the fringe committee to the center pew and pulpit? Wendell Berry offers some direction:

Our destruction of nature is not just bad stewardship, or stupid economics, or a betrayal of family responsibility; it is the most horrid blasphemy⁵

Berry's naming of this destruction points a way for moving these issues forward into the heart and center of the Christian church—the worship of God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The “destruction of nature” to which Berry refers can indeed serve as a call to stewardship and justice, but there is something more. Calling it blasphemy points to a sacred dimension of wrongness. Blasphemy points beyond material and economic assessments toward spiritual ones. Blasphemy names more fundamental spiritual disconnects between our souls and God's coming reign. And the business of souls and God's coming reign is church business indeed. Naming this destruction as a blasphemy extends to the church an invitation to a broader repentance and a pathway for restoring a relevant form of Christian holiness and discipleship that connects these very large and present issues to a whole hearted participation in God's unfolding work of reconciling *all things* to himself (Romans 8:19-23).⁶

⁵ Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 98.

⁶ For a treatment of this connection, see David G. Horrell, *The Bible and*

This proper naming is no small matter. The shade of green that the church is willing to wear depends upon how the issue is named and framed. Most churches readily acknowledge the proper fit between its purpose and social justice. Churches also acknowledge the long tradition of proper stewardship of earthly material within their doors. Because these recognitions are well established, much good work is done within these frames. Many books, teaching materials, and programs are created that inform and challenge churches to improve their stewardship, repent of consumerism, and align their lifestyles.⁷

This has all been important and meaningful work, but it has also proved to be a shallow shade of green that fails to engage the heart of the church. Church members organize creation-care ministries and promote activities for the buildings and grounds and hospitality committees, with occasional forays into education and an annual worship service. But the central identity of the church contained in its worship, fellowship, and teaching ministries remain unchallenged and unchanged. The core storytelling and language of the church, contained in preaching and liturgy, remain unmoved. The core sources of enculturation within the church—its budgets, decision-making, priorities, and fellowship also remain largely unaffected. And so the life of the church at its core has gone on, as described by Jenkins:

the Environment (Oakville, Conn.: Equinox, 2010), 75–80.

⁷ Compiled lists of resources are many. Two examples are GreenFaith's resource collection at <http://greenfaith.org/resource-center> and the National Council of Churches' Eco-Justice resource page at <http://www.creationjustice.org/educational-resources.html>.

Insofar as its notion of life with God could not live into the story of the land, the church read its scriptures, preached its sermons, planned its missions and baptized its members by landless, unsustainable theologies.⁸

We need ways of living into the salvation of *all* creation as the work of Christ in the world, including ecological realities into the very work of *being* Christ in the world, not simply one more agenda item demanding from the church, more of its precious and limited heart, soul, and resources. A deeper green makes the spiritual connections between what is happening with the natural eco-systems and what is happening within the church itself. A deeper green makes clear the connections between creation care, church life, and God's plan of salvation. A deeper green engages the gospel story. In other words, deep green is *Good News*.⁹

A key is put forth in John Gatta's book, *The Transfiguration of Christ and Creation*, where he presents how integrating such themes as Christ's transfiguration into the theological and liturgical life of the church would serve to

Expand the ecological vision beyond the stewardship focus that has thus claimed almost exclusive attention among mainline churches ... and enable her to respond in more integrally liturgical, contemplative and

doxological terms, befitting her authentic charism as the church. For unless the church develops these latter gifts, she risks becoming, in her environmental witness, little more than a technically incompetent adjunct of the Sierra Club.¹⁰

Many leaders in environmental ministry learned their craft from the Sierra Club and similar groups and naturally bring those methods to the churches in hopes of rallying the faithful to behavioral change and social action. But at the same time, many clergy and other church leaders do not recognize the activity of the environmental movement as something "befitting the authentic charism [giftedness] of the church." To aid the recognition, then, we need to make the authentic liturgical, contemplative, and doxological connections between the day's environmental realities and the regular life of the church. Expanding the realm of ecological wellbeing beyond committee actions, material calculations, and life adjustments to include worship, holiness, and salvation is what will fire the bones of the church. Revisiting and reclaiming core Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, incarnation, and redemption will provide the power to mediate a deeper shade of green:

Participation in the interactive mystery of divine life points toward a model of earth ethics more profound than the "stewardship" ideal now favored in religious

⁸Jenkins, *Ecologies*, 26.

⁹Jenkins writes, "A practical Christian ethic ... should show how the environmental crisis amounts to a crisis in the intimacies of God's salvation"; *Ecologies*, 17.

¹⁰John Gatta, *The Transfiguration of Christ and Creation* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 73.

circles, which suffers the liability of suggesting a commodity-based rather than a communitarian outlook.¹¹

Gatta explores these connections and movements in his book, and the transfiguration story is a central text to unpack. The key lies in how the transfiguration and other biblical stories can function within the life of the church to bring the whole creation onto the center stage of church life:

The transfiguration points symbolically toward a doxological ... rather than a resource-management model of apprehending our relationship to the natural world.¹²

Truly to capture its imagination and soul, the church needs to incorporate the larger web of life into its hymnody, liturgy, art, and language. Truly to capture its heart, the church needs to incorporate the whole earth community into its mission and message of salvation and redemption. In these ways, love for God's creation and participation in its health and well-being can move from the fringes toward the center of church life.

New Community, Not New Guilt

To move from resource management to doxology is not to diminish the demands of eco-justice, however. Our day's ecological challenges call the church to expand its circle of awareness and concern to include the "new poor." The new poor include those made poor through society's pervasive and insatiable appetite for convenience and cheap goods (no

matter the methods of obtaining them) and those made poor by tolerance for corporate cost-shifting onto the backs of natural ecosystems, poor human communities, general society, and the next generation. The new poor also include those non-human communities that bear the suffering of displacement, disease, starvation, and extinction as our life choices destroy their habitat and the systems that sustain them. As these are left to bear the suffering and clean up the mess, the church remains silent so long as the prices on the shelves and at the pump remain low, profits remain high, and the resultant suffering remains mostly out of sight of the privileged and the powerful.

But it is neither gospel nor effective to go about wagging a green finger at the church and calling it to shame. The place of healing and recognition to which we all need to arrive is not shame and fear but joy, hope, and love. What will deepen the shade of green in the church is not a louder call to duty but rather a call to celebration. This is so because what the Senegalese poet and naturalist Baba Dioum said is true:

In the end, we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught.¹³

This quotation can be adapted to say, "*We will not save what we do not love, and we cannot love what we do not know.*" In other words, the heart of the task becomes to "familiarize" (make family) not just our human kin but the whole family

¹¹ Ibid., 117.

¹² Ibid., xx.

¹³ Baba Dioum, a line from speech made in New Delhi to the general assembly of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, 1968.

of God's created order. We are kind to each other, care for each other, and include each other, not because the other is a cause but because they are in some way family. And while much family-making in the church is created in the trenches of common service, it is primarily located at the altar, in the fellowship hall, in classrooms, and in homes. It cannot be the fruit of protest politics or self-denial (as important as those are in our day). It will be, rather, the work of inclusion and drawing near. For this work, the church needs to incorporate God's good creation into parish life and the celebration of the gospel, which are the places where we learn to love each other.

Deep Green Church Life

Where in church life can we find the best opportunity to realign our faith practice with a deeper shade of green? What are the places of greatest potential for renewal? They are the places where we proclaim, celebrate, and teach the gospel story. They are the places where we set it to music and dance it. They are the places where we practice and embody it. They are also the places where gospel is more enculturated and absorbed than spelled out and spoken. Since these are the places where we form values and create fellowship, these are the places where we can establish new values and expand the circle of fellowship. The task is to revisit how well our weekly words, worship, and actions accord with the realities around us—the arc of creation.

The church's opportunity is to align its activities of ritual and fellowship with a gospel of salvation that recognizes and

responds to the environmental realities of our present day and connects the church's life within to the world without. There are many places of opportunity for this alignment, but three in particular stand out: worship, teaching, and justice.

Places of Worship and Prayer

Each and every time we dance the liturgy, we tell a story of salvation. Some of the story is told consciously while much is left to the momentum of habit and history. But the whole dance proclaims and perpetuates norms about God's activity in the world and our place in it. Equally, it communicates norms about God's absence from the world and those excluded from it. What does our language of prayer communicate about our values and priorities? What is included and what is excluded? What kind of present and future is painted by our music? What priorities are communicated by the sermons? Who is valued and who is marginalized?

The worship space is the most sacred space for most churches, thus raising the most caution while carrying the most weight. It is the trickiest to navigate and the slowest to change. But for those with access to its forms and functions, it is the most potent tool of exclusion and inclusion, with perhaps the greatest impact on the religious imaginations of church members. What is the nature of the work to do here? One opportunity is to end the anthropocentrism created and sustained in our language, prayer, and music. In much of our language of worship and prayer, the church speaks and acts as if God is solely concerned with the human enterprise while the rest of creation is but a stage for the human drama. The opportunity

for the church is to include in its language, prayers, and praise the concerns and voice of its fellow recipients of God's love and grace: the four-footed, the finned, the rooted, the winged, and all of God's garden of life that surrounds the church. The opportunity is to begin to celebrate God's work more fully in the non-human world while praying for all creation and joining in praise with it.

Such expansion and inclusion cannot be done as only seasonal lessons for children or occasional accommodations to nature lovers and environmental activists but rather require the right engagement in God's whole gospel of salvation. Just as faith communities work to recognize and modify the places of gender or racial exclusion in its language, our own day calls for the further work of recognizing and modifying the anthropocentrism that so permeates our liturgies, prayers, and music.

Places of Teaching and Formation

The places of teaching within the church are not limited to the classroom but include all activity that teaches, from the classroom to the budget to buildings and grounds. There are three areas, however, that are particularly ripe in our day for a deeper green alignment: teaching the salvation story, teaching simplicity and contentment, and teaching sacramental living.

Teaching the Salvation Story. Since the Bible contains many (and sometimes competing) versions of God's salvific work across its varied literature, each church in its own time and place naturally embodies and presents a selective and edited

version (or versions, sometimes competing) of the salvation story. The version is then overtly presented through preaching and classroom teaching as well as liturgy and music each time the community gathers for worship and fellowship. It is also covertly presented through the priorities and processes of the church's political and social life. Both consciously and unconsciously in the routines of its life, each parish selects, repeats, and celebrates the priorities and values it relates to salvation. Throughout church history, these selections and edits have reflected the day's politics, threats, and social struggles, whether in response to Gnostics or Arians, defenders or reformers, or social issues such as wars, plagues, slavery, suffrage, or civil rights. Such editing is not to be maligned, for it is inevitable and necessary. To revisit and revise the gospel story in each era is the necessary hermeneutical work of both mission and integrity. This is so because

We are not simply claiming to read or present what the text "says," but are acknowledging that our reading of the Bible is a construction, shaped by certain priorities and convictions.¹⁴

In our day, compassion calls for the particular hermeneutical work of revisiting and reinterpreting the place and purpose of the whole creation in God's love and work. In the same way, the church's mission calls for the particular hermeneutical work of revisiting and reinterpreting the place and purpose of the human relationship to the whole

¹⁴Horrell, *Bible and the Environment*, 122–23.

creation. Aligning the arc of redemption with the arc of creation is at the heart of this work.

Salvation is, after all, for the lost. Reclaiming our ecologies of grace can give us vocabularies of lament to name our sickened witness to prodigal powers defiling beauty, choking life, and wasting habitats.¹⁵

A deeper green invites the church to revisit and respond to its own selections of gospel tradition to discover what is misaligned and out of balance with the present-day arc of creation. Such an aligned salvation story, in tune with the biblical witness, will affirm the value of all God's good creation from beginning to end—the land, the trees, the animals, the stars, and the human community, all as one worshipping and suffering community, groaning together and looking together for the salvation of God, the redemption of all bodies and the renewal of the earth.¹⁶

It is a challenging task to revisit the core activities of being church, but the realities of our day demand the church do it, not as a fringe activity of a few but a central activity of the whole. This is true both because of the urgency of environmental conditions and the urgency of evangelistic conditions. If human beings are to thrive in a future environment, today's environmental behaviors need to change. If the church is to thrive in a future society, today's evangelical behaviors need to change as well.

¹⁵Jenkins, *Ecologies*, 229.

¹⁶See William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 396–97. See also Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), 34–35.

Teaching Simplicity and Contentment. Such a gospel of right relationship with the whole creation naturally calls for a response of right living, and making connections between gospel and response is certainly not new to the church. But just as the church selects and edits its gospel story, it also selects and edits the list of behaviors it chooses to embrace and embody or ignore and neglect. This process too is natural and necessary. In our day, a deeper green invites the church to embrace and embody the particular values of simplicity and contentment as antidotes to the spiritual diseases that the environmental crisis reveals. In this time of overwhelming technological power, runaway consumption, and disregard for our impact upon God's whole beloved community of life (including ourselves), the challenge for the church is to embody the values that counteract them. The church in our day is well practiced in teaching about sexual morality, charity, and social justice, but far less so in teaching about simplicity, contentment, and self-control. Yet, in our day of rampant addiction, stress, consumption, and distraction, what more relevant values need teaching and modeling?

Simplicity and contentment are certainly biblical values with well-established histories of tradition and practice. There have always been movements, seasons, and communities within the church for which these have been core values. But a deeper green invites the wider church community to be more prophetic in a culture of vast wealth and consumption. In this task, the church has not been counter-cultural at all but is fully captured by the rat race of consuming, competing, and collecting. This is a place where the church could make

relevant connections to people's stress and anxiety and offer deeper, more peaceful, ways to live. This is also a place where the church could use its prophetic voice to expose not just the social costs of rampant consumption, but the personal ones as well. Perhaps what both the church and the planet most need in our day is a people who practice, in the name of Christ, lives of simplicity, gentleness, and contentment as hallmarks of their faith.

Teaching Sacramental Living. An essential path to right living is understanding the sacramental nature of our choices and activities. In our secular and materialistic society, the sense that we are living and breathing daily in God's temple and garden is largely absent, within the church and without. The challenge of this secularized and commoditized view of the world is well articulated by Thomas Berry:

In our present attitude the natural world remains a commodity to be bought and sold, not a sacred reality to be venerated. The deep psychic shift needed to withdraw us from the fascination of the industrial world and the deceptive gifts that it gives us is too difficult for simply the avoidance of its difficulties or the attractions of its benefits. Eventually, only our sense of the sacred will save us.¹⁷

Recognizing the holiness and teaching power of the week-to-week choices and behaviors within parish life is the first

¹⁷ Thomas Berry, in the foreword to Thomas Merton, *When the Trees Say Nothing*, edited by Kathleen Deignan (Notre Dame, Ind.: Sorin Books, 2003), 19.

step to aligning our teaching ministries with their intended outcomes. Such recognition results from seeing as sacred both the world itself and our own acts of living with it. Seeing both the world and our own bodies as God's holy temple are long established aspects of Christian faith. This approach is well captured in Esther de Waal's description of St. Benedict's view of material things:

That quality of reverence, here shown to buildings, is also made to include tools and altar vessels, food and drink, daylight and night. All things are seen as sacred and God-given. One small phrase sums it up: "He will regard all the utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar."¹⁸

Esther goes on to conclude:

If the incarnation means anything at all it means this, that God is reaching me through the material things in the world of his creating. Christianity, after all, is the most materialistic of religions. In the Eucharist I am given bread and wine. The whole world is potentially a sacrament. For it is through the material things of his world that God chooses to reveal himself. If this is so then I should handle those things with reverence and respect, with joy, with gratitude. And when I do, I find that I am constantly aware of God the giver, the creator who makes himself accessible through the things of his

¹⁸ Esther de Waal, *Living with Contradiction* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Morehouse, 1997), 70.

creating, a God who asks us neither to despise nor neglect the temporal order.¹⁹

The practice of sacraments within the walls of the church can serve as a training ground for the recognition of the sacrament of life itself. Extending the sacramental nature of the eucharistic body to the body of creation is a key teaching path available to the church. This is also an appropriate domain of the church, whose work is to open our eyes to the truth of God's presence in the world and our right relationship to it. While the sciences can show us the *way* of things, faith must show us the *value* of things.

Places of Advocacy and Justice

The call to a deeper shade of green in no way discounts the profound and important work done by the churches in the name of eco-justice and advocacy. Nor does it invite the church to turn inward and away from action for social change. All the work of engaging the public domain for healing and justice is completely congruent with a people of God who love their neighbors as themselves and understand that such love calls for loving deeds. But is there a deeper shade of green to apply to the difficult work of advocacy and social change? It is befitting the traditional role of the church to bring a word of hope and strength to help remediate the despair common among those who struggle on this difficult front. This is a despair that also prevents many from engaging the struggle in the first place. This despair has its roots in the facts and figures from

the front lines of environmental advocacy, which so often add up to reveal losing battles and failing causes. This despair can be compounded by those practical-minded leaders who too often conclude that the effort is just not worth the cost, or advise a holding pattern until more numbers come in.

But the Christian tradition provides different accounting methods that lead to different conclusions. Steven Bouma-Prediger presents the opportunity in his concluding chapter:

We are to fulfill our calling to be caretakers of the earth, regardless of whether global warming is real, or there are holes in the ozone layer, or three nonhuman species become extinct each day. Our vocation is not contingent on results or the state of the planet. It is simply dependent on our character as God's response-able human image-bearers.²⁰

The human community desperately needs a faith tradition that makes clear the value of right action for its own sake and the spiritual practice of living accordingly. Such clarity would go far toward mitigating the despair born of comparing our own response-ableness with the world's lack of responsiveness. Here the church can bring a unique word of patience, hope, and strength to a place of pain and great need. The faithful vision of hope from the Psalms to the prophets to Paul can empower a "long obedience in the same direction" so called for by the ecological realities of our day.²¹

²⁰ Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 186.

²¹ The phrase comes from the title of Eugene H. Peterson's book, *A Long*

¹⁹ Esther de Waal, *Living with Contradiction*, 80.

A Life of Grace for All Creation

The real places of engagement for the church, then, are less around the science and economics of the matter and more around the Bible, tradition, faith, and faithfulness. The scientific realities of climate change, toxins, and extinctions are but challenges that invite an inquiry into the relevance and adequacy of our faith practice. The facts and figures of consumerism and eco-injustice invite the same. A deeper green invites the church not only to respond to the social issues brought to her doors through current discoveries and crises but also to revisit her role in perpetuating the attitudes, worldviews, and habits that support them. This work truly befits the charism of the church, a work whose end is not to save the planet but rather to live rightly as the Creator intended and join in the celebration of a rightly aligned gospel of salvation.

In September 2011, the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church issued a pastoral teaching on the environment. In the concluding paragraphs, they wrote:

May God give us the grace to ... accept the gracious invitation of the incarnate Word to live, in, with, and through him, a life of grace for the whole world, that thereby all the earth may be restored and humanity filled with hope.²²

Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society, (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity, 2000). *It is a work on discipleship built on and around the psalms of ascent (Psalms 120–134).*

²²*House of Bishops Pastoral Teaching on the Environment* (Quito, Ecuador, September, 2011): episcopalchurch.org/notice/episcopal-church-house-bishops-issues-pastoral-teaching.

A deeper green is a graceful green, rooted in gratitude, godliness and contentment. It is the color of a deep and abiding faith in the love and care of the God of creation, whose creative love extends to all creation, and whose redemptive love invites the church to join in the loving.

In the end, we will save only what we love. And the converse is also true: We will be saved only by what we love. As Thomas Berry has said, “Only our sense of the sacred will save us.” This challenge, then, cannot be about a heroic church sent out to rescue an ailing environment nor about mobilizing a passionate religious response to “save the planet.” In the end, it is not the planet that needs saving—it is we ourselves that need saving. And it is not only our place on the planet that needs saving, it is also our souls and communities, trapped on an endless treadmill of running, grasping, and getting. The environmental crisis without mirrors the spiritual crisis within.

By letting the fellowship of creation into our worship, prayer, and communal life, and by letting their kinship into our hearts, our own hearts will be saved. Because as we expand our hearts to let them in, we will in turn learn to love them, as is natural for us to do. And as we learn to love them, we will come to recognize their holiness and worth. And as we recognize their holiness, we will in turn come to recognize our own. And in that knowing, we too will be saved. For that is, after all, the gospel of salvation.