



## *The 2007–2008 Word & World Lecture*

# The New Green Christianity: Why the Church Is Vital to Saving the Planet

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When you walk across the fields with your mind pure and holy, then from all the stones, and all growing things, and all animals, the sparks of their soul come out and cling to you, and then they are purified and become a holy fire for you.<sup>1</sup>

—Martin Buber

If the current scientific consensus about global warming is accurate, then we are now living in an objectively apocalyptic situation in which our planet is teetering on the edge of disaster. Jim Hansen, top climate specialist at NASA, claims we have just ten years to reduce greenhouse gases before global warming reaches an unstoppable tipping point and transforms our natural world into a “totally different planet.” Global warming—the trapping in earth’s atmosphere of greenhouse gases such as CO<sub>2</sub> from car and power plant emissions—is causing air and ocean temperatures to rise.

The specter of rising temperatures has recently been documented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a UN-sponsored group of dozens of climate scientists from more than one hundred countries. While earth’s temperature rose by one degree last century, the panel’s current predictions are that global

<sup>1</sup>Martin Buber, quoted in Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1974) 200–201.

*In the present environmental crisis, only religion has the moral authority to motivate us to look beyond our private self-interest to the greater good of the planet itself. We must do this now, before it is too late.*

temperatures will rise by three to ten degrees this century, resulting in the widespread melting of arctic glaciers and perhaps even the ice covering the Greenland landmass. This mass melting could then raise sea levels, astonishingly, by one to two feet or more, causing low-lying shore communities such as the San Francisco Bay Area and lower Manhattan gradually to disappear. Whole island chains, such as the Maldives off the coast of India, or much-loved Venice, Italy, would eventually slip under water. Even now, climate change is contributing to a global die-off of species similar to the last mass extinction event over sixty-five million years ago when the great dinosaurs were wiped out. Today biologists conservatively estimate that thirty thousand plant and animal species a year are driven to extinction. Even the polar bear is now proposed as a threatened species.<sup>2</sup>

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***“Only religion can save us now. Only religion has the moral authority to motivate us to look beyond our private self-interest to the greater good of the planet itself.”***

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While science can analyze the record climate change since the industrial revolution, it cannot provide the necessary moral foundation for answering the existential question, What difference does it make whether our children or grandchildren survive the killer weather carbon dumping is destined to cause? While many scientists themselves are motivated by moral and even religious concerns, science *as such* is not a moral or religious enterprise. Science cannot say—as, for example, the religions of Abraham claim—that the natural world is God’s creation, lovingly designed for the sustenance and joy of all beings, and therefore humans are tasked with the responsibility to care for their planet home. In particular, science cannot assert, as religion can, that the earth is *sacred* and therefore deserving of our protection. My claim here is that without such an all-encompassing, hypermoral claim the prospects for saving the planet are slim indeed. Science is not enough. Like the chronic smoking behavior in a previous generation, we now know our carbon-intensive lifestyles are killing us and many other species, but we cannot stop our behavior. We are fall-down carbon drunks, fossil fuel addicts who cannot break our global addiction cycle. Only religion—or some alternative religion-like moral system—can save us now. Only religion has the symbolic potency and moral authority to break our collective carbon addiction cycle by motivating us to look beyond our private self-interest to the greater good of the planet itself.

Not international terrorism, but global warming is the most dangerous security threat to civilization as we know it. Yet otherwise powerful nations seem impo-

<sup>2</sup>Elisabeth Rosenthal and Andrew C. Revkin, “Science Panel Says Global Warming is ‘Unequivocal,’” *The New York Times*, 3 February 2007, A1, A5. Also see James Gustave Speth, *Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), and Elizabeth Kolbert, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006). The ELCA’s social statement “Caring for Creation” and related materials about global warming can be found at the ELCA Web Site ([www.elca.org/advocacy](http://www.elca.org/advocacy)).

tent to stop the coming cataclysm. So in the face of chronic political dysfunction, communities of faith are rising up to confront the challenge. These faith communities have the power to gather together the fragments of human vision for a just and sustainable world into a coherent moral narrative that can enable the type of revolutionary social change needed in this historic moment. Precisely at this point in our history when the earth is most under siege, people of faith have become acutely aware of the ancient ecological wisdom at the roots of their religious and cultural traditions.

While I will allude to different religions here, I want primarily to analyze how Christianity is awakening to its planetary responsibilities. No longer relegated to a long list of special interests, today care for creation has become a core moral issue for biblically centered Christians concerned about climate change and the loss of global biodiversity. This newly embraced passion for the well-being of the natural world is provoking a seismic shift in values within American culture and politics. One of the reasons Republican candidates fared so badly in the 2006 mid-term elections is that the religious electorate was concerned about President Bush's failure, among other issues, to break America's dependence on fossil fuels by developing a sustainable energy policy that could blunt the impact of climate change. A recent cover article for the *New York Times Magazine* featured interviews of so-called "green evangelicals" who now see a "biblical mandate for government action to stop global warming."<sup>3</sup> Moving beyond polarizing social issues such as homosexuality, abortion, and stem cell research, churches on the left and the right are articulating a Christian response to global warming by promoting renewable energy, community-based agriculture, and conservation of natural resources. This article consists of both analysis of this change and advocacy for this change—a call to move beyond the impasse between *red-state* and *blue-state* politics by embracing the power of *green* religion to engender civic renewal and environmental health in our time.

## THE GREEN JESUS

One of the best ways to rehabilitate Christianity's *earthen* identity is through a nature-based retrieval of the persons of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as the green face of God in the world. Recovering the gospel narratives through environmental optics opens up Jesus' ministry as a celebration of the beauty of the earth and a caring search for justice for all the denizens of the good creation God has made. Jesus is a green prophet: he ministers to the poor and forgotten members of society and criticizes extreme wealth based on a disregard of one's neighbor and exploitation of the gifts of creation. In the horrifying story of the Rich Man and Lazarus in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus sketches a contrast between a rich man who feasts sumptuously on a daily basis and Lazarus, riddled with pus-filled sores licked by dogs,

<sup>3</sup>David D. Kirkpatrick, "End Times for Evangelicals?" *The New York Times Magazine*, 28 October 2007, 60.

whose diet consists of scraps off the rich man's table. In all the Gospels Jesus reserves some of his harshest judgment for this rich man who is consigned to a fiery hell where he is punished for his reckless lifestyle and lack of regard for Lazarus. The green Jesus regularly speaks truth to power by criticizing the rich who take advantage of nature's bounty and push the poor into lives of poverty and ill health.

Neil Darragh writes beautifully about the "deep incarnation" of Jesus—an enfleshment "into the very tissue of biological existence"—to underscore God's compassionate care for the community of all living things.<sup>4</sup> Jesus' deep incarnation begins in a barn surrounded by farm animals, where he enters consciousness already intimate with the rhythms of agricultural life. The expanse of nonhuman nature plays a crucial role in his baptism as well: full immersion in the Jordan river prepares Jesus for his work ahead, and God appears as a bird, the form of the Holy Spirit who alights on Jesus as he emerges from the Jordan. After his baptism, Jesus inaugurates his public ministry by departing alone into the desert for forty days. In this vision quest in the wild, he begins a lifelong practice of finding peace and sustenance through regular sojourns in wilderness areas. His first miracle turns water into wine at Cana—a celebration of the goodness of the fruit of earthen vines; and his first miracle with his inner circle of disciples is a fish catch of overwhelming numbers—another kind of celebration of the goodness of creation. In turn, the last supper is a group meal that anticipates the saving death of Jesus by celebrating the good gifts of creation—eating bread and drinking wine.

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Many of Jesus' parables—the Lilies of the Field, the Birds of the Air, the Lost Sheep, the Mustard Seed, the Sower and the Seed, and the Great Banquet—are demonstrations of the natural world as the expression of God's loving relations with the world of humans, animals, and plants. Indeed, the food web itself is infused with divine power: “Look at the birds of the air,” Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, “they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them” (Matt 6:26 NIV). God feeds our avian kin through interlocking food chains. God is not an external force far removed from the concerns of everyday plants and animals but the interanimating power of the life-web necessary for the survival and fruition of all beings, human and nonhuman alike. God lives in

<sup>4</sup>Neil Darragh, quoted in Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart That Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006) 58–60. In addition to this book and Edwards's *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), other ecological christologies include Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); J. Matthew Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet: A Christian Call to Action* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2006); James Jones, *Jesus and the Earth* (Kelowna, BC: Wood Lake, 2003); and James B. Martin-Schramm and Robert L. Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003).

and through the miracle of photosynthesis, the herbivores that live off plant species, the carnivores like us that eat other plants and animals, and the decomposers that break down dead tissues and thereby reenergize the soil for renewed plant growth.

The beauty of life on earth is a major theme of Jesus' ecological ministry. His judgment against the rich who exploit nature's gifts and his vision of God's power in the life-web is grounded in his aesthetic wonder at the splendor of life on earth. Listen again to the Sermon on the Mount: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these" (Matt 6:28–29). The elegance of this passage is difficult to fathom. Here Jesus says that everyday field flowers, just in being what they are, are more glorious than was King Solomon in all his regal splendor and power. Solomon, whose royal court was legendary for its grandeur and magnificence, is deemed less resplendent than the wildflowers that grace the meadows enjoyed by Jesus in his journeys throughout the Israel of his day. In this passage, Jesus, the environmental trickster, reverses the priority we assign to grandiose built structures and favors instead the quiet beauty inherent in the natural order of things. The most spectacular architectural treasures of the ancient world are inferior to the rich colors and textures that shine forth from the highways and byways of Jesus' earthly ministry.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus' major sermons take place at natural sites saturated with divine power—the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Pool at Siloam—and his famous self-referential sayings are consistently drawn from nature—I am the bread of life, I am the true vine, I am the good shepherd. He is crucified on a cross made of wood—a tree fashioned into lumber is the mode of Jesus' saving death; he is raised from the dead from a tomb hewed out of the side of a mountain—a poignant reminder that the deep reaches of the earth can be the medium through which God's vivifying power will initiate new life. In a word, Jesus was an "animist." He experienced divinity everywhere within nature—he saw and felt God alive in every rock, tree, animal, and body of water he encountered. The witness of Jesus to the world is that our planet is the home of life-giving Spirit—the earth is God's here-and-now dwelling place where everyday life is charged with sacred presence and power.

## THE CARNAL SPIRIT

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk and Christian discussion-partner, writes that when "we touch the Holy Spirit, we touch God not as a concept but as a living reality."<sup>6</sup> A retrieval of the Spirit's disclosure of herself in the biblical literatures as one with the four cardinal elements—earth, air, water, and fire—is a

<sup>5</sup>I am grateful to Patrick Keifert for the reminder that Jesus' aesthetic passion for nonhuman nature is one of the wellsprings that feeds his moral convictions about responsible earth care.

<sup>6</sup>Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead, 1995) 21.

second means by which Christianity's carnal identity is recoverable, not as a concept, but as a living reality, or better, as a living being.<sup>7</sup> (I will use the female pronoun to name the Spirit, based on some compelling precedence in this regard, a topic I can only reference in the note below.)<sup>8</sup>

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*“pictured as a bird on the wing, the Spirit is a living being who shares a common physical reality with all other beings”*

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(1) As *earth*, the Spirit is the divine bird, often a dove, with an olive branch in her mouth, who brings peace and renewal to a broken and divided world (Gen 8:11; Matt 3:16; John 1:32). Pictured as a bird on the wing, the Spirit is a living being who shares a common physical reality with all other beings. Far from being the “immaterial substance” defined by the canonical theological lexicon, the Spirit is imagined in the Bible as a material, earthen life-form who mediates God’s power to other earth creatures through her physical presence.

(2) As *air*, the Spirit is both the vivifying breath who animates all living things (Gen 1:2; Ps 104:29–30) and the prophetic wind who brings salvation and new life to those she indwells (Judg 6:34; John 3:6–8; Acts 2:1–4). The nouns for Spirit in the biblical texts—*ruakh* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek—mean “breath” or “air” or “wind.” Literally, the Spirit is pneumatic, a powerful air-driven reality analogous to a pneumatic drill or pump. The Spirit is God’s all-encompassing, aerial presence in the life-giving atmosphere who envelops and sustains the whole earth.

(3) As living *water*, the Spirit quickens and refreshes all who drink from her eternal springs (John 3:1–15; 4:14; 7:37–38). As physical and spiritual sustenance, the Spirit is the liquid God who imbues all life-sustaining bodily fluids—blood, mucus, milk, sweat, urine—with her flowing divine presence and power. The water-God makes possible the wonderful juiciness and succulence of life as we experience it on a liquid planet sustained by nurturing flow patterns.

<sup>7</sup>The emerging field of ecopneumatology—nature-based reconstructions of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit—is represented by the work of Sharon Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disenchantment* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); Chung Hyun-Kyung, “Welcome the Spirit; Hear Her Cries: The Holy Spirit, Creation, and the Culture of Life,” *Christianity and Crisis*, 15 July 1991, 220–223; Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003); Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); idem, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, *God’s Spirit: Transforming a World in Crisis*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1995); Nancy Victorin-Vangerud, *The Raging Hearth: Spirit in the Household of God* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000); Mark I. Wallace, *Finding God in the Singing River: Christianity, Spirit, Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005); and Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

<sup>8</sup>On the biblical and theological history of feminine language and imagery for the Spirit, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, the Odes of Solomon, and Early Syriac Tradition,” *Saint Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 37 (1993) 111–140; Gary Steven Kinkel, *Our Dear Mother the Spirit: An Investigation of Count Zinzendorf’s Theology and Praxis* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990); and Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), especially 128–131.

(4) Finally, as *fire*, the Spirit is the bright flame who alternately judges evildoers and ignites the prophetic mission of the early church (Matt 3:11–12; Acts 2:1–4). Fire is an expression of God’s austere power; on one level, it is biblically viewed as the element God uses to castigate human error. But it is also the symbol of God’s unifying presence in the fledgling Christian community, as happened on the day of Pentecost with the Spirit’s arrival in tongues or flames of fire. The fire-God is necessary for the maintenance of planetary life: as furnace heat, fire makes food preparation possible; and when harnessed in the form of solar power, fire from the sun makes possible safe energy production that is not dependent on fossil-fuel sources.

Let us look more closely at one of the earthen metaphors of the Spirit in Christian tradition, namely, the manifestation of the third member of the Trinity as an avian life-form—the bird-God, as it were, of the biblical witness. In the miracle of the incarnation, Christians believe that God literally became *human flesh* in the person of Jesus, and that God-in-Jesus might again return to earth in similar form. But did God not also—literally—become *animal flesh* in the sacred dove witnessed to, for example, in Jesus’ baptism? And if this is the case, is it possible that God could again appear in similar avian form, or in some other animal life-form, today or in the future?

In the story of Jesus’ baptism in all four gospels, the Spirit bird, an earthen life-form, comes down from heaven and lovingly alights on Jesus’ person, perching protectively on his head and shoulders, as God’s voice of parental love and pride is heard by all present, saying, “You are my Son the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). This winged God of Christian witness often appears in contemporary Native American-style artistic depictions of the Trinity as well. In a series of trinitarian icons that celebrate the cultures of the first peoples of the Americas, Father John Giuliani paints each member of the Godhead in meditative intercommunion with one another.<sup>9</sup> The Spirit in Father Giuliani’s images is figured as a sacred animal, specifically, a bird of prey—a falcon in some of the icons, an eagle in others. The paintings depict the divine raptor hovering in a state of compassionate equilibrium between a wizened, caring grandfather, on the one hand, and a self-giving young man with arms outstretched to the world, on the other. Both the grandfather (God the Father) and the young man (Jesus) gesture with open hands to the viewer, symbolizing their expansive love for all beings; likewise, the fluttering bird between them, reminiscent of the bird-God in Jesus’ baptism, outstretches its wings in a similar gesture of openness and love. The divinity of each figure is marked by a golden halo around their head. And the unity of the human world and the animal world is enacted by locating the hovering Spirit God, the bond of love, at the center of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

<sup>9</sup>For reproductions of John Giuliani’s trinitarian icons, visit the web site of Bridge Building Images, Inc. ([www.bridgebuilding.com](http://www.bridgebuilding.com)).

Christianity's "animist" identity is reawakened through a recovery of the New Testament's ancient wisdom that while God is beyond all things, God is also radically enfleshed within all things. The move to Christian animism is a necessary step in harnessing the potential of Christian faith to address the current earth crisis. Apart from a deep green reawakening of Christianity's central teaching—namely, that all creation is literally Spirit-filled as embodied in the life and message of Jesus—it will be impossible for many persons to experience a spiritually charged connection to the land that is our common home and common destiny. And without this connection, I fear that the prospects of saving our planet, and thereby saving ourselves, are not good.

### THE GREENING OF THE CHURCHES

Green Jesus and Green Spirit theology is a Christian conceptual response to ecological depredation and global warming in our time, but practically speaking, what are Christian and other congregations doing to promote environmental and climate justice? Today, many North American churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship are transforming themselves into earth-care centers by protecting God's creation and safeguarding public health. These groups are energized by alliances with organizations such as Interfaith Power and Light, which provides free energy audits, alternative power advice, and green building upgrades for religious centers, seeking to overcome their reliance on nonrenewable energy; the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, which promotes green educational curricula for the major branches of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish faiths; the Evangelical Environmental Network, which recently called for mandatory greenhouse gas emissions caps in North America; and the Sierra Club's Faith Partnerships Program, which has created numerous environmental faith-and-action cells.

Last spring I traveled to a Presbyterian church in suburban Phoenix to participate in and witness this church's ongoing transformation into a green congregation. To this end, University Presbyterian Church in Tempe, Arizona, is regularly incorporating environmental stewardship teachings into worship and educational programs; developing service projects focused on earth-healing, including green building projects in their own bioregion and water development missions abroad; reducing their own consumption of nonrenewable and polluting forms of energy by, for example, simply converting their incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescents; and practicing good earth-keeping on their own grounds through extensive recycling programs, the use of nontoxic cleaners and fertilizers, and the purchase of fair-trade products.

Recently I viewed a PBS *Moyers on America* telecast entitled "Is God Green?"<sup>10</sup> In this program, evangelical pastor Tri Robinson of the Vineyard Christian Fellow-

<sup>10</sup>To view online for free, or to order a DVD copy, visit the PBS web site ([www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/green/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/green/index.html)).

ship in Boise, Idaho, makes the case for conservation of natural resources based on God's command in Genesis for humans to exercise stewardship over the earth.<sup>11</sup> The program shows members of the Boise church reforesting wilderness areas and setting up a systematic "tithe your trash" recycling program. Some members of this church refer to the anti-earth implications of evangelical dispensationalism—the belief that God has ordained history to unfold according to divinely prescribed ages or "dispensations" in which the final age, the end times, will be ushered in by Jesus' return, the rapture of true Christians, and the fiery destruction of the earth.<sup>12</sup> But this faith community has rejected this sort of dispensationalist apocalypticism in favor of a return to the biblical ideal of creation care: restoring the earth as a garden of beauty blessed by God and tended by God's special caretakers, we the human community.

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Viewing this video and reading Robinson's work highlights for me a creative tension between conservative and progressive Christians on the question of creation care. In the PBS special, Robinson makes a distinction between Father God and Mother Earth: Christians are called to exercise care for the created order not because the earth is their mother but because God is their father. Only God the Father is worthy of devotion and praise; to accord the earth such honor, by implication, is a type of paganism or idolatry that dare not speak its name. But contrast this conviction with a recent article in *E: The Environmental Magazine*, entitled "The Scoop on Dirt: Why We Should All Worship the Ground We Walk On."<sup>13</sup> The article argues that soil, while generally unrecognized and taken for granted, is essential to the well-being of life on earth. Soil traps and recharges rainwater for drinking purposes; it provides habitat for numerous plants and animals; it recycles decaying organic matter which in turn becomes a source of new energy; and soil functions as a giant carbon sink for trapping dangerous carbon dioxide emissions that would otherwise escape into the atmosphere. Unheralded and neglected, soil is worthy of our respect, even our adoration and reverence, because it is foundational to the life-sustaining ecosystems we rely on for daily sustenance.

I find it ironic that the modern secular environmental movement is attaching sacred significance to soil and earth—that we should worship the ground we walk

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<sup>11</sup>See Tri Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth: Rediscovering the Church's Responsibility to Environmental Stewardship* (Portland: Ampelon, 2005).

<sup>12</sup>For an analysis of the relationship between apocalyptic theology and environmentalism, see Stephenie Hendricks, *Divine Destruction: Wise Use, Dominion Theology, and the Making of American Environmental Policy* (Hoboken, NJ: Melville, 2005).

<sup>13</sup>Tamsyn Jones, "The Scoop on Dirt: Why We Should All Worship the Ground We Walk On," *E: The Environmental Magazine*, September-October 2006, 26–39.

on—at the same time that Bible-centered Christians remain troubled by the ascription of holiness to anything other than God. To paraphrase Robinson, the earth is not our mother, that is, the earth itself is not holy in the manner that pagan goddess traditions assign sacred value to all things. God’s demand in the Torah that Israel should not worship the image of any earthen life-form, and Paul’s similar denunciation in the New Testament of idolaters who worship creatures rather than the Creator, seem to cut off any return path back to a view of God as fundamentally nature-centered and the earth as holy ground worthy of our reverence and devotion. But the strange and wonderful minority traditions of the Green Jesus and the Green Spirit within Christian testimony do offer resources for precisely this return route—a road less traveled, where Jesus and Spirit are depicted as fully embodied in the earth, and the natural world itself is reenvisioned as sacred place.

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The witness of Christian Scripture and traditions is to the world as abode of divinity, the home of life-giving Spirit, God’s here-and-now dwelling place, where the warp and woof of everyday life is sacred. God is not a dispassionate and distant potentate, as in classical feudal theology, who exercises dominion over the universe from some far-removed place; rather, in and through this planet that is our common home, God, now grounded in the earth, is earnestly working with us to heal the planet. It is not blasphemous, therefore, to say that nature is sacred. It is not mistaken to find God’s presence in all things. To speak in the terms of Christian animism, it is not wrong to reenvision Christianity as continuous with the worldviews of first peoples who bore witness to and experienced divinity everywhere—who saw and felt Spirit alive in every rock, tree, animal, and body of water they encountered. Christianity now can do the same, and Christians can say, sacred is the ground we stand on; holy is the land where we are planted; blessed is the earth within which we live and move and have our being.

The great work of our generation will be to develop inspired models of sustainable development that promote ecological and climate justice for all of God’s children. Sustainable development articulates policies that address *this* generation’s vital needs without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their own vital needs. For highly industrialized economies like our own, sustainability will be predicated on kicking our habits of dependence on fossil fuels, the primary source of global climate change. Religious faith is uniquely suited to fire the imagination and empower the will to make the necessary changes that can break the cycle of addiction to nonrenewable energy. Many of the great social movements in this country’s history—the abolitionist groundswell of the nineteenth century, the

suffragist associations of the early twentieth century, and, most notably in recent history, the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s—were energized by prophetic Christian leaders who brought together their scriptural values and passion for justice to animate a moral force for change more powerful than any other force to stop them. To paraphrase William James, religion today, in the face of cataclysmic climate change, must declare the moral equivalent of war by becoming more disciplined, more resourceful, and more visionary in fighting the causes of global ecological depredation. The supreme calling of our time will be for many of us to find a spiritually grounded and morally compelling approach to engaging the problem of climate change—and to do so now before it is too late. ⊕

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