Nature and the Environment in Contemporary Religious Contexts

Nature and the Environment in Contemporary Religious Contexts

Edited by

Muhammad Shafiq
and Thomas Donlin-Smith

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Nature and the Environment in Contemporary Religious Contexts

Edited by Muhammad Shafiq and Thomas Donlin-Smith

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-0530-8
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0530-8

Dedicated to the
sweet memories of Doris Hickey
and all those who have worked to
build bridges in our world.

The Hickey Center is thankful to Mary Van Keuren
and Anastasia Tahou for editing and assisting
in publishing of this book.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

There was no interfaith dialogue when I was a student in the 1970s at Temple University's Department of Religion. However ecumenical dialogue was well established and the department had an ecumenical library where I worked as a fellow under the guidance of Professor Leonard Swidler. It was a great opportunity for me to read and learn about ecumenism, gaining an understanding of how Christian communities had struggled to overcome their differences.

I learned about the significance of dialogue, a gateway to understanding difference, building bridges, reconciling, and cooperating for a greater cause. My exposure led me to participate in ecumenical meetings and conferences. But the discussion and papers presented there were about Christian theology and denominational differences. Jews, Muslims, and others had little space. When I enquired about this from my Jewish friend, I was told that it was still good to participate. When Jews, Muslims, and other faiths increased in number, the doors would open.

The doors were opened in the middle of 1980. Ecumenical experts began to discuss amongst themselves the words interreligious and interfaith dialogue. Soon the words *interfaith dialogue* became more known in the communities and gradually replaced ecumenical dialogue.

I came to Rochester, New York in 1989 and was engaged in an interfaith forum representing more than twenty-five faiths. I think Rochester may be the first interfaith city to form interfaith commissions and signed inter-community agreements to foster relations. The Catholic-Jewish agreement was signed in 1989, the Christian-Muslim commission formed in 1994, the Commission on Jewish-Muslim Understanding in 1997, and the Catholic-Muslim Agreement in 2003, resulting in the Muslim-Catholic Alliance (MCA) to combat hate and stereotyping.

Rochesterians considered the interfaith movement to be the second civil rights movement, supporting the mission of the first civil rights movement and expanding on racial justice to include religious, ethnic, and cultural justice and harmony. As educational institutions responded to the first civil rights movement by emphasizing the teaching of African and African American studies as well as women and gender studies on college campuses, it was essential to expand it to global and interfaith studies to meet the challenges of our contemporary world.

In 1999, representatives from the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist religions in Rochester came together to establish an academic center for interfaith studies to teach and train people of all faiths to stand against hate and build bridges of respectful understanding. From this effort, the Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue (CISD) found its home at Nazareth College on November 28, 2001, shortly after the September 11 tragedies. In 2004, the Center was integrated academically and, in 2011, was renamed the Brian and Jean Hickey Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue in honor of two of the Center's most dedicated long-time supporters. At the same time the Interfaith Studies Chair was created through the generous support of the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Herndon, Virginia.

The Hickey Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue promotes scholarship, skills, and strategies for living justly in a religiously diverse and pluralistic world. The Center fosters this capacity through: increasing religious literacy; teaching skills for individual and community-wide communication on matters of religion, faith, and spirituality; and contributing to the growing scholarship of interfaith studies. Our strategies, both locally and globally, are:

- to establish safe environments conducive to understanding the diversity of faiths in our world and our community through hospitality and open dialogue;
- to provide educational resources and to create scholarship that will help establish an environment of understanding and equality;
- to inspire individuals, communities, and institutions to live and communicate more effectively with those from other religions and faith backgrounds.

In fulfilling the goals associated with our youth and our community, we came to realize a need that has been present with us from our birth at the beginning of the 21st century: the need to study the interfaith movement as it has blossomed in recent years. This study occurs when we gather experts from diverse disciplines together with professors of religion and theology to discuss topics of importance to the interfaith movement. At first, these gatherings resulted in a great deal of creative and critical talk among the participants but little publication of what was said. At the suggestion of the participants and many others, we began the Sacred Texts and Human Contexts series of conferences and publications. The purpose of both is to bring together experts in interpreting the traditions of the world's religions to examine common issues.

The series provides a forum for the interfaith movement to express new ideas and offer critical reflection on old ideas in order to stimulate the intellectual life of a global society. We had our first conference, which dealt with the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam on dividing and uniting humanity, in June, 2013 at Nazareth College. More than 250 religious studies professors and religious professionals participated and more than 70 academic papers were presented. The peer reviewed papers resulted in a publication of twenty-six chapters titled *Sacred Texts and Human Contexts: A North American Response to A Common Word Between Us and You*. Our second international conference, which dealt with the topic of wealth and poverty, was held at Fatih University in Istanbul, Turkey in 2014. The peer-reviewed papers were published as *Poverty and Wealth in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* by McMillan Palgrave in 2016. The conference committee then decided to include all faiths in future conferences. Therefore, our third international conference was on nature and the environment in religions and was held in May of 2016. The peer-reviewed papers were submitted to Cambridge Scholars for publication. Our next conference is on women and gender in religions and is scheduled for July 30-Aug.1, 2017 at Nazareth College.

No institution can thrive without collegial and financial support. The Hickey Center is blessed with an abundance of support from Nazareth College by President Daan Braveman, Esq.; Vice-President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Andrea K. Talentino; Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Dianne Oliver; the Religious Studies Department – especially Dr. Susan Nowak, S.S.J., its chair, and Thomas Donlin-Smith, advisor to the Hickey Center; Brian and Jean Hickey; the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) at Herndon VA; and countless members of Nazareth's administration, faculty, and staff.

The discernment of the scholarly needs of the interfaith movement and designing of the programs to meet these needs would not have been possible without a team of committed religious leaders, professionals, and academics, all dedicated to the common cause of respectful tolerance and peaceful coexistence among faiths. The Hickey Center is fortunate to have Dr. Nathan Kollar, chair of the Center's advisory board, who worked diligently during all these years. We are thankful to all members of the conference committee including Dr. David Hill, Oswego State University of New York; Dr. Mustafa Gokcek, Niagara University; Dr. Richard Salter, Hobart and William Smith Colleges; Dr. Etin Anwar, Hobart and William Smith Colleges; Dr. Matthew J. Temple, O.Carm., Nazareth College; Dr. Nancy M. Rourke, Canisius College; and of course, Dr. Thomas Donlin-Smith, co-editor of this scholarly endeavor.

An entity such as the Hickey Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue is always in need of institutional bonds of interfaith ideals and friendship. When the bond is evidenced by participation and financial support, the ideals become realized in shared programs and research. Our institutional colleagues are found in the Department of Religious Studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, cosponsors of this conference; the Dialogue Institute of Temple University with the support of my teacher, Dr. Leonard Swidler; the Department of Religious Studies at St. John Fisher College with the support of Father William Graf; Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, chair in Islamic Studies, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, John Carroll University, with the support of Zeki Staritoprak; and the College of Arts and Sciences and Department of History at Niagara University with the support of Mustafa Gokcek and others.

In addition to all those mentioned above I must mention my family. Their understanding is amazing especially that of my grandchildren who are so often disappointed that their grandpa is busy with college work at home and can hardly spare enough time to play with them. Thank you to all my family for their patience and their support of this most important work of interfaith.

The Hickey Center is indebted to its founders and the community leaders and individuals who give us hope for the future and support our mutual quest for respectful religious and cultural dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

Thank you,
Muhammad Shafiq, PhD
Hickey Center, Nazareth College

INTRODUCTION

THOMAS DONLIN-SMITH[1]

This volume is the third collection of essays gleaned from three Sacred Texts and Human Contexts conferences sponsored by the Hickey Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue since 2013. These conferences have created an expanding community of interfaith scholars from around the world who enjoy the intellectual and spiritual challenges of honest and focused conversation on topics of common concern. Even as I compose this introduction to the book, the fourth conference (on issues of sex and gender in the religious traditions) is just a few weeks away, and I am increasingly excited at the thought of reconvening our conversation partners once again for a new exploration of our religious traditions and their varied expressions in diverse human contexts.

The central question posed by this book is: "What do our sacred texts and religious traditions say about the human relationship and responsibilities to the earth and its nonhuman species?" Although this single question animates the book, the scholars answering the question come from four continents, focus their attention on aspects of six different religious traditions, and apply a variety of academic disciplines and interpretive methods to their work. Such diversity is the source of the profound intellectual thrill and moral value we experience in interfaith

[1] Dr. Thomas Donlin-Smith is a professor of religious studies at Nazareth College. He teaches courses in biomedical ethics, ethics of the professions, religion and politics, religion and science, comparative religious environmental ethics, Christian ethics, and religious studies theories and methods. Dr. Donlin-Smith's research interests include theory and method in the study of religion, religious ethics, and the relationships among religion, science, and politics. He directs the Nazareth College interdisciplinary program in ethics and is an advisory board member of the Brian and Jean Hickey Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue. He has served on numerous institutional ethics committees, human subjects research committees, and institutional animal care and use committees. He received his B.A. from The Ohio State University, M.Div. from Wesley Theological Seminary, and Ph.D. from the University of Virginia.

conversation, but it can also present a challenge when it comes to weaving the threads of thought into a single, coherent volume! Some essays cover overlapping themes or materials and are therefore closely related to each other; others are more distinctive in material or approach. Some essays focus on traditional scriptures while others are based on a more elastic understanding of "sacred texts" and examine texts, stories, and thinkers from the wider history of the religious traditions (e.g., Bonhoeffer and Merton). Furthermore, the range of traditions under examination has been expanding over the three volumes of this series from an initial focus on the three prominent Abrahamic religions to a consideration in this book of religions originating in South Asia and Africa as well. We trust that the adventurous reader will enjoy this sprawling journey into the thought-worlds of diverse cultures and scholars as we address together the crucial environmental issues of the twenty-first century.

For persons committed to any of these religious traditions and concerned about contemporary environmental issues, the guiding question of the book is of obvious importance. However, it is fair to ask whether this question has any significance for individuals or organizations whose assumptions are more secular. There are at least three reasons to answer affirmatively. First, as any member of a diverse society should understand, there is great humanistic value in understanding our fellow citizens. As any participant in interfaith dialogue could tell you, understanding religious texts and traditions is understanding people, the people with whom we will debate and create a common future. Religion remains, for better or worse, a powerful shaper of persons' worldviews and values and to ignore it is to self-inflict a diminished capacity to relate successfully to others. Second, although much foolishness and cruelty have been perpetrated in the name of religion, the scholars represented in this volume are interested in gleaning the profound wisdom of the ages also present in the religious traditions. Religious texts and traditions compile some of the best of human thought and aspirations from across billions of people and thousands of years. Why would we deny ourselves such a resource when facing the formidable challenges of our environmental crisis? Finally, religion has indeed been complicit in environmentally destructive human beliefs and behaviors; these too need to be understood. At least as far back as Lynn White's famous essay, it has been well understood that religion's record on the environment (as on every significant human issue) has been decidedly ambiguous. It benefits us all—religious and secular alike—to understand ways in which religion has functioned contrary to ecological health so we may avoid such mistakes not just in religion but in our secular ideologies as well.

Any attempt to apply religious sources to a contemporary social issue inevitably runs into the epistemological question of the relationship of religion to various other sources of wisdom. In particular, in this case, there is the question of how religious guidance relates to the insights from biological science. The reader of this volume will soon see that, for most of the scholars here, there is very little sense of conflict between religion and science. Most of the authors take for granted the scientific consensus that we are indeed living in a period of unprecedented human-caused environmental crisis. The human context from which they consult their religious texts and traditions is one of serious ecological peril although experienced in different ways and to different degrees in different parts of the world. Religiously-inspired climate science denial might be a significant phenomenon in some quarters, but the scholars contributing to this volume are interested not in denying, but in making use of, the best of human knowledge from all sources. They have little desire to argue scientific points from a nonscientific basis: they leave scientific questions to the scientists. However, not all questions are scientific questions. What these scholars of religion can provide is insight into religious persons' worldview assumptions, guiding stories, motivating role models, ways of reasoning, and moral principles, and thereby clues into ways of inspiring more environmentally responsible behavior in the future.

Although, as noted above, it is a challenge to organize such wide-ranging material, and some essays might have been placed elsewhere in the book, the volume is arranged into three parts. Part One, "Human Contexts Within Nature," introduces the general issue before us: that all our diverse human social contexts are contained within the context of nature and that this global natural context is suffering unprecedented stress. Authors writing from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist perspectives whet our appetite by reviewing our planetary situation in the new Anthropocene Age, analyzing some of the attitudes and behaviors that have brought us to this point, and identifying images and themes from their traditions that might help us move into the future more constructively.

Part Two, "Imperatives from Sacred Texts and Traditions," provides examples of scholars discerning and interpreting moral imperatives regarding the environment from sacred texts. Whether the source text is the Bible, the Qur'an, or the Devī Māhātmaya, the authors of these essays are working the hermeneutical circle. In each case, the scholar brings the concerns of their contemporary context to texts deemed to have sacred authority yet reflecting human contexts of other times and places in order to distill insights and moral imperatives of value for their current situation.

This dynamic conversation across time and place is inevitable in anything that can be called a tradition. It entails a complicated process of determining which aspects of that tradition are most useful for the present environmental context, and the stakes are especially high when one regards these traditions as sacred and that present context as dire.

The essays of Part Three, "Practicing the Imperatives," while providing further examples of discernment of moral norms from religious texts and traditions, also describe action inspired by the imperatives. They tell us of religiously informed people engaging in sacred art, interreligious dialogue, community organizing, and environmental activism as they work to bring about positive change for our imperiled planet. In keeping with the broad scope of the book, the examples come from different continents, centuries, and religious contexts, but the common theme is recognition of the value of other-than-human nature and a commitment to act upon that recognition.

Although this volume was developed around the concept of "sacred texts" engaging diverse "human contexts," there really are no simply human contexts. The human, social, or cultural is always enmeshed in the natural, environmental, or biological. Realizing that there is no pulling them apart is an example of the kind of shift of consciousness required by life in the twenty-first century. Our age of unprecedented eco-social urgency requires a dramatic reconsideration of many of our fundamental concepts and assumptions. People who are committed to the world's religious traditions face this challenge the same as anyone else, but with the additional complication that some of those concepts and assumptions are not only fundamental to their worldview, but also regarded as divinely validated. The scholarly work reflected in this book contributes to this reconsideration effort. In so doing, we participate in what Thomas Berry called the "Great Work" of our time, the dramatic shift of human thought and behavior to forms more conducive to a future for the biosphere of our beautiful planet earth.

PART I

OUR HUMAN CONTEXTS WITHIN NATURE

CHAPTER ONE

ECOLOGIES OF DIVERSITY: BEYOND RELIGIOUS AND HUMAN EXCEPTIONALISM

CATHERINE KELLER[1]

Abstract: If the climate crisis must now be treated not as a set of exceptional emergencies but as an inescapable emergence, it belongs at the center of religious, and therefore interreligious, concern. Theology as political can contribute to the struggle for a just and sustainable planetary future, but only inasmuch as it exposes and exceeds a secularized political theology of sovereign power. Such sovereignty comes dominated by a series of exceptionalisms: religious, national, economic, and anthropic. A theology of ecosocial justice will have multiple religious sources; here, for instance, a Christian struggle beyond anthropocentrism takes invaluable cues from an ecological Islam.

It is heartening in this multiply stressed moment of planetary existence to be thinking together about the living context of the world religions. The world—our environment, at multiple scales—is being invited to come out of the background and into the focus of religious sensibility. The Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann formulates the challenge concisely: "The so-

[1] Catherine Keller is professor of constructive theology at the Theological School of Drew University. In her teaching, lecturing, and writing, she develops the relational potential of a theology of becoming. Her books reconfigure ancient symbols of divinity for the sake of a planetary conviviality—a life together, across vast webs of difference. Thriving in the interplay of ecological and gender politics, of process cosmology, poststructuralist philosophy and religious pluralism, her work is both deconstructive and constructive in strategy. *Note: I thank my research assistant, Winfield Goodwin, for his invaluable editorial help.*

called great world religions will only prove themselves to be 'world religions,' when they become earth religions and understand humanity as an integrated part of the planet earth."[2] Of course the world religions, particularly in their Abrahamic modes, have often been nervous about their own earthiness, fearing it could lead to idolatrous nature-worship, pantheist naturalism, modern reductionism, atheism, materialism. But thank God (by whatever name you call upon him, her, or it) in the context of a conversation on "Nature, Environment and the World Religions," I do not have to make a case for the deep earthiness of our faiths. We can think from the shared presumption that the planetarity of a world religion no longer refers simply to its universal outreach or truth claim. Planetarity now, as always, signifies at the same time our ecological responsibility.

I do not therefore have to take time to persuade the participants in a conversation on religion's living context that the earth—as the context of us all, as the world that we humans coinhabit alongside all those nonhuman others with which we are intimately interrelated—is characterized by a rapidly mounting crisis. Even before the great political pivot against all environmentalism, we knew we were in trouble. As the ice melts and the seas rise, as the oceans get poisoned, the forests burn, and the droughts intensify, as the food supply decreases and we continue exponentially to increase, as humans—and disproportionately the human communities that have been systematically disadvantaged by our global socioeconomic practices—become subject to increasingly devastating displacements, and face therefore new levels of violence, every religious resource we can muster will be needed. Even before the new wave of potentially fascist anti-immigrant politics became manifest, we realized that migration, poverty, race, and xenophobia—particularly Islamophobia—cannot be understood in abstraction from the effects of climate change. Participants in this conversation knew already that we were facing a new kind of emergency situation before its stunning political acceleration.

There are really just three points I want to make in this paper. I offer them in the hope that they help us communicate with each other about this planetary crisis. By talking together we hope to get and to give hope. Hope for a collective planetary future that is worthy of the earthly hopes of each

[2]Jürgen Moltmann, "Eine gemeinsame Religion der Erde (A Common Religion of the Earth): Weltreligionen in ükologischer Perspektive (World Religions in Ecological Perspective)," in Verlag Otto Lembeck 10/1605, "Okumenische Rundschau" (2011), 26 (my translation). As discussed in my *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 279-80.

of our traditions. Those hopes come encoded in our sacred texts—particularly in the prophetic, messianically energized eschatological traditions. Hope of course is itself a deeply and problematically religious idea, one that is all too easily abstracted and diverted from our earth future. Hence the phrase: hoping against hope.

My first point here is that the coming climate emergency should not be treated as a state of exception but as a now inescapable emergence. The legal notion of the state of emergency is driven by a politics, indeed a political theology, centered in an emergency power defined as the power of the exception. However, multiple, distinct, historical exceptionalisms—the racial exceptionalism of White Anglo-Saxonism, the nationalist exceptionalism of United States power, the economic exceptionalism of contemporary regimes of global capitalism—in fact propel the current emergency. And, exceptions end up proving their rule. Given our conference topic, I will focus upon a very old, very theological, and very unexceptional interplay between a human and a Christian exceptionalism.

My second point will be that an alternative political theology is needed. It requires an alternative to the sovereign power of the exception. But it would need to be an alternative capable of rising to the occasion of coming catastrophe. The key to this alternative is what I have elsewhere called "entangled difference." Here difference itself is to be read not as separation but as inseparable relation. In the midst of our differences, we may exclude or ignore the depth of our relations. But the vital truth is that we do not thereby become ontologically independent of those relations or of that depth. If we are constituted in and by relations—good ones, toxic ones, and unknown ones—then our very differences form the interlinkages that make us up. This is true of individual, economic, ethnic, and of course species diversity. And in this conversation we attend particularly to this truth as manifest in religious diversity, whether we respect our differences or practice a barbaric indifference. In our interfaith reflection on nature, we may begin to consider that just as all creatures develop interdependently, so too, *naturally*, do our religions. This is the ecology of the creation: we are all in it together. This insistence may help us to face planetary catastrophe, in order to prevent it as much as possible, and to adapt to it non-barbarically when it cannot be averted.

So then catastrophe itself can here and now become a catalyst for transformation. That allows me to state my third point in one sentence: if we ask what can turn catastrophe into a catalyst, the answer must begin with "hope."

(1) Let us consider the first thesis, then: that this unprecedented emergency should not be treated as a state of exception but as a now-inescapable emergence. Just what will emerge is unpredictable. It will involve catastrophe, no doubt, but how extreme that catastrophe will be depends on global human response. Is the right image of the human response so far that of a car speeding down a mountain toward a cliff with still time to brake? Or rather, as many environmentalists now say, are we already going off the cliff?

Climate change will intensify all manner of already existing conflicts and inequalities. It does not so much cause them as it inflates them. The example of Syria and the rise of ISIS is telling (even Prince Charles told it in Paris). In the context of five years of unprecedented drought and Assad's repressive response, the refugee crisis has become dire. At the same time, a broader anti-immigrant affect drives the electoral successes of right-wing parties in Europe. And now we face the trumping of democracy in the United States, in the election of an anti-immigrant and climate-denialist president. Does this all suggest a merely accidental connection between Islamophobia and environmental catastrophe?

These totally different issues require a range of political responses. But it may be crucial to think them together, in relation one to another. I would suggest one possible approach to doing so. It draws upon what is called political theology, a current discussion in political philosophy much more so than in theology. It considers the major concepts of modern politics to be secularizations of theology. Sovereignty itself is modeled upon divine omnipotence. Political theology gets largely defined by the German legal theorist Carl Schmitt's work from the 1920s on. It centers in this proposition: "Sovereign is he who decides in the exception."[3] The exception is kin to the miracle—a novum that interrupts business as usual, a power that makes the rules but need not play by them. A medieval model of divine sovereignty thus is secularized in the Western form of political exceptionalism. In other words, it is a sovereignty derived from a presumption of Christian supremacism. That dominant theological legacy draws its force from the theology of a single, exceptional incarnation.

It is then a Christian exceptionalism that sanctified modern secular models of imperial sovereignty. If we had time, we could track the particular forms of Anglo-Saxon racial exceptionalism, of United States exceptionalism, its American dream and its manifest destiny, and then of

[3] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, translated by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5.

the hypersecularized exceptionalism of neoliberal global capitalism.[4] But given our interreligious focus, I would draw attention particularly to the way this exceptionalism unfolds in a thousand-year arc of crusades. It begins with Pope Urban II in 1096, with an aggression meant to bring European powers to a new unity. This papal power play exemplifies Schmitt's politics of friend versus foe. Fast-forward to Bush II invading Iraq almost a millennium later, declaring thereby a new crusade.[5] He powered up a coalition of the willing, united Islamophobically in the interests of big oil and the sovereignty of neoliberal capital. As Giorgio Agamben argues, the state of exception—suspending the applicability of international law concerning prisoners—insidiously became the rule.[6] He recalls the camps, the *lager*, of the second World War, and he gestures simultaneously toward the proliferation of new camps: the massive refugee camps dotting the political landscape of Europe today.[7] But neither Agamben nor the other leftist interpreters of political theology analyze the ecological context of these current dehumanizations.

Nonetheless, once one perceives the link of various waves of Islamophobia—waves both religious and secular—to a founding Christian exceptionalism, one might wonder: does climate change not remain peripheral to it? Or might one begin to recognize that what is enabling climate catastrophe is at root another effect of the same Christian exceptionalism? This time it is taking the form of our *human* exceptionalism: the notion of the human as not just different from other creatures, not just uniquely talented, but as the supreme exception—the

[4] For an incisive analysis of the history of White supremacy and American exceptionalism in the context of contemporary instances of violence against people of color in the United States, see Kelly Brown Douglas's *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015). See also William Connolly's *The Fragility of Things*: *Self-Organizing Processes, Neoliberal Fantasies, and Democratic Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), and Joshua Barkan's *Corporate Sovereignty: Law and Government under Capitalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

[5] For an extended discussion of this legacy of exceptionalism in the case of political crusades in the distant and not-so-distant past, see "Crusade, Capital, and Cosmopolis: Ambiguous Entanglements" in my *Cloud of the Impossible*, chapter 8.

[6] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, translated by Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[7] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

denaturalized creature who transcends the material interdependencies of the earth.

(2) Creaturely interdependence forms the content of the alternative that I propose to the politically theological exceptionalism. Isn't this human exceptionalism, however, based on the very first chapter of what for many of us is sacred text—on Genesis, with its creation of the human in the image of God? For decades, Christian ecotheology has been returning over and over to that chapter. Some come to question the sacrality of Gen 1.26-28 as it grants special status, dominion, to humanity to fill up and subdue (*kabash in Heb*) the earth. Certainly the text has been used to justify the modern Western domination project. But other ecotheologians argue that if the text is read in context, dominion can only mean environmental responsibility. After all what God declares "very good" is not the exceptional human but rather "everything that God had made" [1.31]. The entire Genesis collective, what Lynn White in 1966 called "the democracy of all God's creatures." If "to except" means originally "to take out," the *imago dei* does not then mark us as the *exception* to the creaturely collective; rather, we arise as its communicative *exemplification*. Our distinctiveness is indubitable: we are created in *imago dei*, to partake of God's creativity, called to exercise our creativity with stewardly care. As the papal encyclical reminded us of Genesis 2.15: "to till and to keep the earth," not to exploit and to waste it. And so certainly the Christian counter-tradition that heeds "the cry of the poor, the cry of the earth" has at least evolved a minority alternative to the economic, political, and anthropocentric exceptionalism of western civilization.[8]

And, as far as I can discern, the theologies that emphasize the gift of creaturely diversity tend also to recognize the gift of *religious* diversity. Interfaith relations and ecological relations both express a deep—an ontological—relationalism, as is clear in the half-century traditions of process theology, for example, and of ecofeminism. A main reason I chose to study with a process theologian, John Cobb, is that he taught that it is not just secular liberalism calling Christians to be open to learn from other religions. It is Christ calling us. Not just to the conversion of others, not just to conversation, but to mutual transformation. Cobb's focus was on

[8] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Papal Encyclical Letter (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015).

Buddhism. And much recent comparative theology moves between Christianity and Hinduism.

But we pluralist Christians have not gone far—if I may risk choosing an example particularly relevant to this conversation—not far, that is, in recognizing how much we may need to learn from our sibling religion Islam precisely to help us overcome the Christian anthropocentrism. The 2015 Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change offers an apt and timely entry point: "If we each offer the best of our respective traditions, we may yet see a way through our difficulties."[9] Consider this citation it offers from the Qur'an: "No living creature is there moving on the earth, no bird flying on its two wings, but they are communities like you" [6.38]. The elegant evocation of the importance of animal communities does not contradict the bible; it adds something of crucial importance: birds, bees, bears; these are not just creatures, but communities, like ourselves. This lends them a specific register of relational complexity, and therefore of social dignity. And this: "Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is something greater than the creation of humankind, but most of humankind do not know [this truth]" [40.57]. I know of no sacred text of Christianity that in this way directly and pointedly names the whole cosmic context as at once greater than the human and also largely unknown to be such. This sense of cosmological mystery does not diminish human distinctiveness—the point is not to blur difference. Instead, the text beautifully undermines human exceptionalism. And it forges a new sense of *tawhid*, a unity of peace that is not sameness but honors difference, what Abdul Asiz Said and Nathan Funk call "peace in Islam" as "ecology of the spirit."[10] Ibrahim Ozdemir and other Muslim environmentalists stress the following remarkable passage: "Don't you see that it is God Whose praises all beings in the heavens and on earth do celebrate, and the birds with wings outspread? Each one knows its own mode of prayer and praise. (And God knows well all that they do.)" [24:41-42][11]

May I respond: and do we not see how this text says something terribly fresh? It echoes old Hebrew psalms of trees clapping their hands, of all the

[9] http://islamicclimatedeclaration.org/islamic-declaration-on-global-climate-change/

[10] Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Funk, "Peace in Islam: An Ecology of the Spirit," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[11] Ibrahim Ozdemir, "Toward an Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'anic Perspective," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust.*

earth worshipping the Lord, but the Islamic text makes explicit that all beings pray. This simple acknowledgement undermines our sense of being the exception before God, and it frees prayer itself from anthropocentric talktalktalk into a form of cosmic attunement. Such cosmic attunement as we might want to relearn from the birds now, as we spread our wings to face the consequences of our species' predatory self-destruction.

Put more abstractly, the alternative to sovereign exceptionalism can be couched as "entangled difference." Our differences do not get diminished. Rather, they get emphasized—sometimes exaggerated, sometimes opposed—within our entanglements. This relationality echoes that of quantum entanglement, the physics that attests to the instantaneous "intra-activity" (*Barad*) of all things, at the most minimal material level of the electron, across any measurable distance whatsoever.[12] Recognizing that all relations are relations of difference—that however much we differentiate, decide and separate, we can never quite extricate, that indeed at the most basic material level we remain ontologically non-separable from the universe of relations—keeps us thinking, perhaps even praying, cosmically. And the cosmos turns us always in our time back to our own planet and its ecology of badly frayed relations.

Entangled difference applies as much to interfaith exchange as it does to intercreaturely integrity. Do I become less Christian if I learn more from Islam? No. My Christianity just gets more complicated—folded together with the faiths of others. It was folded together with Judaism and with Hellenism from the start. Every new dialogue is an enfolding. Not a homogenization. In Christianity this critical insight seems to have been embodied in the early Renaissance by Nicholas of Cusa, who studied the Qu'ran and called for a religious peace based on awareness of divine mystery. In *Cloud of the Impossible*, I borrow from him a mystical language of enfolding and unfolding: the divine *complicatio* and *explicatio*. No one, and no one religion, cognitively masters God; the divine infinity is everywhere, and therefore unfolds in different ways exemplified in diverse religious Ways. I find Cusa's argument from 1453—forged then in the face of the catastrophe of the Ottoman defeat of

[12] Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 801-831. For an extended discussion of Barad's work and more generally of the entanglement of quantum physics and negative theology please see "Spooky Entanglements: The Physics of Nonseparability," in my *Cloud of the Impossible*, chapter 4.

Constantinople—still oddly credible. It lends ancestral help in constructing an interreligiously apt Christology.

Christ is then not the supreme exception but the great exemplar, the embodiment of a love that seeks to materialize in all ways, in all creatures, in all prayers. So it helps us who are Christians to challenge the notion of the single, ontologically exceptional incarnation. We can have recourse to the medieval tradition of Christ the exemplar. It is arguably more faithful to the sacred texts than any Christian exclusivism. Even of John 14.6, the bane of religious pluralism: "I am the way, and the truth and the life." This gets routinely mispronounced as, *I am THE way, THE truth* . . . In context, however, the text has nothing to do with other religions. He was saying to his disciples, who were expressing fear of losing their way if he dies, that he had already entangled them in his life, in his way.

We might say now that Christ is for his followers of course the way. He leads us on a path of radical hospitality and respect for the stranger, and therefore in later terms to interfaith exchange, and beyond, to the shared work of the earth. That is the work of resistance to the approaching barbarism: the work of a just love.[13] It is perhaps not far from the way of an ecological *tawhid*. Which is not to say it is the same: The point is not to impose homogeneity upon diversity, but again, to connect our differences intentionally. If we can systemically interweave our religious diversity with our remaining ecological diversity—that is, if we can entangle our very human religious diversity with an attention to the nonhuman heaven and earth—our species may just have a chance of a viable future. Of course, it is a chance to be yanked from the jaws of emergency. So then let us insist on a new collective emergence. It would be the way of a political theology of the Earth.

(3) This at least is the hypothesis of my final point, which responds to the question: How do we shift climate catastrophe into catalyst? Hope, I claimed above. Not optimism, not denial, not despair. Without hope, nothing—*nihil*, nihilism. We will surrender to the seductions of consumerism, the intensities of more immediate crises or the paralysis of despair. But what does hope hope *for*? Hope as a normative value arises from the biblical text. It comes from the prophetic tradition of the novum, in Isaiah: "I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" So the novum must not be confused with the exception,

[13] Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, Andrew Goffrey trans. (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015).

which will only prove the hopeless rule of the same old sovereignties. This hope is for a transformation of the heavens—*hashamyim*—the atmosphere and the earth, a radical renewal of everything, of the genesis collective.

The great textual danger those of us who have some voice among the Abrahamisms must address may be the tendency to a passive reliance on omnipotent power either to intervene as the miraculous exception or just to control it all. The latter means that when we trash the earth, it must be God's mysterious will. Then our hope is just for a supernatural heaven, not the renewed heavens and earth. Such exceptionalist hope is the very hope we must hope against. For as the great theologian of hope Moltmann puts it, "We have no need to leave this world behind in order to look for God in a world to come. We only need to enter this world with its beauties and terrors, for God is already there. God waits for us through everything that God has created, and speaks to us through all of the creatures."[14]

The ancient prophetic writings of hope all took place in the face of historical crisis. The book of Revelation may be the most extreme. The image of the whore of Babylon, indeed much of the text, trends misogynist. But John's hallucinogenic vision at the same time outs the total destructiveness of a power-hungry world empire, offering in great detail the economics of its global trade: the "cargo of gold, silver jewels, horses and chariots, slaves…." The apocalyptic trauma however does not end, as rumor would have it, with the end of the world. "The end of the world" is not a biblical production but a later discursive reduction. The book actually ends with a renewed, urban planet: "Let everyone who is thirsty *come*. Let everyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift." (In our epoch of expanding drought and of the poisoning of the waters of the earth, this has new meaning. We may now hear the reverb with another ecoreligious register, the chants of Standing Rock Sioux demonstrators: "*mni wiconi*, water is life.") The text itself is not gift but poison if it supports fatalism, antagonism, and human helplessness.

Perhaps catastrophe can become catalyst only if we read our apocalypses through the prophetic tradition of justice, mercy, of *tawhid*. Then, even amidst the terrors of the earth, we know ourselves awaited. The prophetic tradition works beyond theism, as in for instance the text of Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*. Like Pope Francis, Klein shows the double jeopardy of environmental and economic depredation:

---

[14] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Living God and the Fullness of Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 171.