

The Wicked Problem of Climate Change

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CLIMATE CHANGE, *LAUDATO SI'*, CREATION SPIRITUALITY, AND THE NOBILITY OF THE SCIENTIST'S VOCATION

by *Matthew Fox*

Abstract. This exploration into spirituality and climate change employs the "four paths" of the creation spirituality tradition. The author recognizes those paths in the rich teachings of Pope Francis's encyclical, *Laudato Si'* and applies them in considering the nobility of the scientist's vocation. Premodern thinkers often resisted any split between science and religion. The author then lays out the basic archetypes for recognizing the sacredness of creation, namely, the Cosmic Christ (Christianity); the Buddha Nature (Buddhism); the Image of God (Judaism); the "Primordial Man" (Hinduism), as well as the premodern universal teaching of "God as Beauty." He addresses the subject of evil which deserves serious attention in the face of the realities posed by climate change and the resistance to addressing them. In the concluding section, the author speaks of a new Order of the Sacred Earth that was launched in fall 2017 to gather persons of whatever spiritual tradition or none to devote themselves to preserving Mother Earth.

Keywords: Buddha Nature; climate change; Cosmic Christ; creation spirituality; Image of God; *Laudato Si'*; Order of the Sacred Earth; Pope Francis; scientist's vocation; spirituality

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It has been said that a goal of the Institute for Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS) is to “yoke climate science with the power of spiritual values” (Carr 2017, 2). In this essay, I wish to explore some spiritual values in light of the dominant moral issue of our time, climate change. I summarize these values in what has come to be known as “the four paths” which form the essential structure for naming the spiritual journey in the Creation Spirituality tradition. In doing so, we are exploring the essence of our Western mystical heritage.

In the first part of this essay, I recognize these four paths as richly represented in Pope Francis’s encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si’*. In the second part, I comment on how premodern consciousness addresses the modern split between science and religion, exploring creation spirituality in historical context. In the third part, I recognize the four paths as present in today’s science and underscore the noble vocation of the scientist who, like others doing good work, is a “midwife of grace” and therefore fulfills the archetype of priesthood or spiritual leader and healer.

In the fourth part, I submit the primary archetype for the sacredness of the Earth. Since a loss of the sacredness of the Earth lies at the heart of the current worldview which treats earth as an object ripe for extractive capitalism (Klein 2014) and not a subject, it is essential to recover such archetypes including that of the Cosmic Christ (Christianity); the Buddha Nature (Buddhism); the Image of God (Judaism); and the “Primordial Man” (Hinduism). I also address the ancient premodern tradition of “God as Beauty” which can be found in major Christian mystical theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart but also among indigenous peoples, for example the Navajo peoples.

In the fifth part, I introduce the subject of evil which also needs to be addressed when dealing with climate change whether evil be identified as denial, hypocrisy, apathy, *acedia*, greed, or despair. Any or all of these evils, by detouring us from facing climate change, lead today to ecocide itself.

In the sixth part, I propose a new Order of the Sacred Earth (OSE) to gather persons of whatever spiritual tradition or none to devote themselves to being mystics (that is lovers) of Mother Earth and prophets (that is warriors defending Mother Earth) in a community and movement that focuses on doing something at the level of our beings as well as our work to *interfere* (Rabbi Heschel’s [1973] definition of the work of the prophet) with ongoing Ecocide.

We do not need a new religion or a new church at this time in human and planetary history—ecological urgency is too pressing for that—but a new order that is a spiritual order and not religious as such (i.e., not tethered to any particular religious institution or tradition but welcoming to all). Such a movement and community seems altogether appropriate to ignite intergenerational wisdom wherein young and old can work together and that encourages a focus especially for the younger generation, a focus on

the sacredness of the Earth for our own and other species and for the health and well-being of the generations that will follow us. Such a movement and vision would provide a new *adventure* for the young to throw themselves into.

THE FOUR PATHS OF CREATION SPIRITUALITY IN *LAUDATO SI*'

Pope Francis's encyclical boasts a title borrowed from his namesake Francis of Assisi's famous poem to Brother Sun and Sister Moon. "Laudato Si'" translates as "praise be to you," and carries a message and a spirit that echoes much of the soul of St. Francis. Humans around the world are eager for some moral voices to stand up and be counted, so beset are we by multinational corporations and their lobbyists and their media moguls who, like secular popes, declare infallibly each day what is and is not news while they pad their corporate pockets with dark money raised by an avalanche of consumer goods most of which feed the world unnecessary goodies. Surely this is one reason the Dalai Lama has the following he does. And it is the reason Pope Francis is being heard by more and more people around the world and why, borrowing from his hero, Pope John XXIII, he addressed this encyclical on climate change and ecology to all persons of the world, Christian or not, believers or not.

After all, as the waters rise as glaciers disappear, as animals go extinct, as farmland turns to dustbowls, as storms grow ever more frequent and violent, as floods occur, as oceans become more and more acidic, as the air becomes more and more impossible to breathe, does it really matter whether one is atheist or Buddhist, Catholic or Baptist, Hindu or goddess, indigenous or Muslim? Or indeed scientist or priest, business person or professor, mechanic or artisan, actor or journalist? As I wrote years ago in my book *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (Fox 1988), there is no such thing as a Roman Catholic rainforest, a Buddhist river, a Hindu ocean, a Baptist moon, a Lutheran sun, or atheist cornfield. Ecological realities teach all our religions and all our religious ideologies a bit of *humility* (which actually derives from the Latin word for *earth*). Earth is far older than religions. With this encyclical Pope Francis is saying something similar: What unites us is our common need and the Earth's common beneficence—and it is time to put our doctrinal scuffles aside and unite for our own and future generations' common good.

Years ago when I was a college sophomore in Dubuque, Iowa, the Mississippi River was overflowing. All sorts of us, college students, seminarians, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish, blue collar workers, employed and unemployed, young and old, gathered at the river banks to create sand bags and hold back the rising waters. I recall observing to myself then that it did not matter how different we were in ideology or religion or background or age. It was my first real experience in *deep ecumenism* and an awakening that

in the context of the deepest issues in life, common survival and nature's force among them, we are one.

This same lesson comes through in this encyclical written for all of us on the planet today who are observing the health and beauty of our precious home disappear before our very eyes.

There is much in this encyclical to celebrate. One question put to me recently by a very wise priest/psychiatrist I know was this: "Surely this encyclical is about the coming of age of creation spirituality, isn't it?" We will consider the four paths that make up the very skeleton and backbone of creation spirituality and further concepts that are explicit both in the creation spirituality tradition and the pope's encyclical.

I first wrote about the four paths explicitly in an article on Meister Eckhart, the fourteenth-century mystical genius who I realized held them implicitly (Fox [1979]1981). I also made those four paths the basis of my gathering of thirty-six of Eckhart's most important sermons in my presentation of those sermons translated from the critical German and Latin editions along with a commentary on each (Fox [1980]2000). Then I explored them in greater depth in my book *Original Blessing* (Fox [1983]2000) as well as in my dialogues with Thomas Aquinas in *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality* (Fox [1992]2003).

These four paths are in direct and conscious repudiation of the traditional three paths of purgation, illumination, and union which ignore so much of the spiritual journey including joy and delight, creativity, justice, and compassion and were created *not* out of the Biblical tradition but rather by third-century philosopher Plotinus (204–270) and fifth-century philosopher Proclus (412–485) neither of whom drew on the Biblical and Jewish traditions. Indeed, in a story I relay in my autobiography, very early in lecturing on these four paths I was approached by a Jewish scholar of Jewish mysticism who studied with Gershom Scholem who said to me that I was the first Christian theologian he knew who threw out the three paths and that "the four paths you speak of in their place are deeply Jewish" (Fox [1996]2015, 138).

The four paths are the *Via Positiva*, the *Via Negativa*, the *Via Creativa*, and the *Via Transformativa*. I have learned over years of teaching them and learning from students applying them and researching them that without doubt these paths are archetypal. The first two are found explicitly in the tradition of the West (Cognet 1967, 66, 67) but the second two are implicit and I was the first to name them in an explicit way.

Via Positiva in Laudato Si'

Let us first look at the language and concepts utilized in the encyclical. I was very pleased to see the Pope appeal to beauty on twenty-seven different

occasions! Sadly, the idea of beauty as a name for God has been sorrowfully missing in discourse and theology during the modern era (Descartes has a whole philosophy with no philosophy of aesthetics). In premodern times, beauty was indeed a significant category for the divine. The religion of the Navajo is built around multiple prayers about beauty and spirit. Beauty plays a prominent role in creation spirituality theology (Fox [1983]2000, 212–19).

Premodern theologians invoked beauty as an essential theological category. For example, Meister Eckhart equates beauty with salvation when he says: “This, then, is salvation, when we marvel at the beauty of created things and praise the beautiful providence of their Creator or when we purchase heavenly goods by our compassion for the works of creation” (Fox [1980]2000, 423). Thomas Aquinas had this to say about beauty and divinity (and much more!):

God is beauty itself, beautifying all things The Creator of beauty has set up all the beauty of things Divinity is manifest through the names of Wise and Beautiful God, who is supersubstantial beauty, is called beauty because God bestows beauty on all created beings. . . . God is “always” beautiful. The generation and corruption of beauty are not in God, nor is there increase or diminution, as appears in corporeal things. . . . God is a fountain of total beauty. The beautiful is said to be from God as a cause. From this beautiful One beauty comes to be in all beings, for brightness comes from a consideration of beauty. But all beauty, through which a thing is able to be, is a kind of participation of the divine brightness. . . . The beautiful, which is God, is the end of all like the final cause of all things. For all things have been made in order that they imitate the divine beauty in whatever way possible. (Fox [1992]2000, 162, 104, 105, 106)

Physicist Paul Carr, who has devoted an entire book to *Beauty in Science and Spirit*, would, I think, find an ally in Thomas Aquinas. In his book Carr offers the following provocative observations.

I was amazed to learn, through Gleick’s (1987) *Chaos: Making a New Science*, that the beauty of nature has an underlying mathematical structure called fractal geometry. . . . Beauty in religious art and in sacred spaces can be seen from the pyramids to cathedrals. This led to the idea that science and spirit both have beauty in common. Both are beautiful to me. Beauty has many facets. How might they be defined? (Carr 2007, 5)

He states that “the complementary beauty of science and spirituality offers a better alternative to atheistic materialism than intelligent design” (Carr 2007, 41) and he cites Alfred North Whitehead: “The teleology [goal] of the universe is directed to the production of Beauty” (Carr 2007, 42). Beauty includes “tragic beauty” as Whitehead puts it: “The Adventure of the Universe starts with a dream and reaps tragic beauty” (Carr 2007 80).

Carr is intent on finding “ways of relating science and religion” (Carr 2007, 81). I am proposing in this article that creation spirituality and its naming of the four paths as the archetype of a spiritual journey provides such a way. In addition, Carr invokes the work of cosmologist Brian Swimme and geologist Thomas Berry in their efforts to present the new creation story from science suggesting that their book *The Universe Story* “can become the basis of a more comprehensive ecological and social ethics that sees the human community as dependent upon and interactive with the Earth community. Only such a perspective can result in the flourishing of both humans and the Earth” (Carr 2007, 230). In many ways Pope Francis in his encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, invokes that same story (the principal author of that encyclical received his master's degree in creation spirituality from my program in the Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality [ICCS] at Holy Names University where Brian Swimme was on our faculty and Thomas Berry was a regular lecturer).

Carr closes his book with a citation from Henri Poincaré: “If nature were not beautiful, it would not be worth knowing” and with a question: “How can theology conflict with science when they both emanate from nature's beauty?” (Carr 2007, 148). A question Thomas Aquinas would be very eager to sign on to and discuss. It is also found as an essential issue, one might say, in Pope Francis' encyclical on the Environment.

In the encyclical we read phrases like the following: “Nature is a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness” (section 12). After speaking of the disappearance of ecosystems and creatures, we are told to beware of substituting “an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty with something which we have created ourselves” (section 34). God's plan is “for peace, beauty and fullness” (section 53). The entire universe holds a “mysterious beauty of what is unfolding” that we can come to know (section 79). Jesus himself invited “others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way through out the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things: ‘Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest’” (section 97). Humans bring about a “quantum leap” in beauty with our art including aircraft and skyscrapers and music and more (section 103). “A kind of salvation . . . occurs in beauty and to those who behold it” section 112; this very much parallels what Meister Eckhart taught in the passage we considered above). In the spirituality of the Christian East beauty “is one of the best loved names [for God] expressing the divine harmony and the model of humanity transfigured” (section 235). “At the end we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite Beauty of God” (section 243).

Pope Francis offers a prayer at the conclusion of his encyclical “for all who believe” in a God who is a creator God. In it he moves beyond theism as he begins the prayer this way: “You are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.” And he asks God to “pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty.” He asks that “we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction” (section 246).

A final prayer asks God to “Teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe, for all things speak of you” (section 246). This too rings with Meister Eckhart who says every creature is a word of God and a book about God and that all creatures are “words of God” (Fox [1980]2000, 58).

The *Via Positiva* plays a rich role in this encyclical. The word “goodness” (another word for this is “blessing” as in “original blessing”) is invoked on at least eleven occasions. Pope Francis unites beauty with goodness when he says: “Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.” The result? “Rather than a problem to be solved the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise” (section 12).

Pope Francis cites Saint Basil who called God “goodness without measure” and we are encouraged to recognize creation as being more than a “system which can be studied, understood and controlled” but rather as “a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all” which came about “not from chaos or change” but from love (sections 77, 76).

Pope Francis invokes the mystical experience of being struck by the awe and wonders of nature: “The mystic experiences the intimate connection between God and all beings, and thus feels that ‘all things are God’ [a citation from St. John of the Cross]. Standing awestruck before a mountain, he or she cannot separate this experience from God, and perceives that the interior awe being lived has to be entrusted to the Lord” (section 234).

Indeed, the words “awe” and “wonder” are employed at least fourteen times in the encyclical. Echoing the teaching of Rabbi Heschel that without awe “the universe becomes a marketplace for us” (Heschel 1973, 55), the Pope teaches that “if we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder . . . our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs.” He invokes St. Francis who refused “to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled” (section 11). Surely, this object-fetish gets at the heart of the modern world’s abuse of nature. So long as we are in touch with “wonder and awe” we recognize a “continuing revelation of the divine” in the smallest and largest forms within nature. Thus we are called to “contemplation of nature” (section 85). Our wonder “takes us to a deeper understanding of life” (section 225).

Pope Francis calls for our expressing “gratitude for the gifts of creation” (section 227) and the first “community conversion” ought to entail “gratitude and gratuitousness” and “a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures but joined in a splendid universal communion” (section 220). This awareness of our interconnectivity with the rest of creation is spoken of numerous times in this letter. We live in an “interdependent” world (section 164) wherein “God wills the interdependence of creatures” and since “no creature is self-sufficient” creatures exist “in the service of each other” (section 86). Interdependence characterizes human society as well and the entire species (section 164).

A cosmic awareness and a sense of the Cosmic Christ (though not by name) are invoked frequently in this document as well. In the Eucharist “the whole cosmos gives thanks to God” and “the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love” (section 236). The term “universe” is invoked twenty-three times and “universal” eighteen times. We are told that “the universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face. It is not enough to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things” (section 233). In his prayer that concludes the encyclical, the pope prays to God saying, “You are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures” (section 246). Notice the word “in”; not just “above and beyond.” God is *in* all things macro and micro (panentheism).

This too is Cosmic Christ or Buddha Nature or Image of God theology such as Rabbi David Seidenberg presents in his study on eco-theology that concludes that all beings are an image of God. How like the Cosmic Christ or Buddha Nature is the Image of God archetype! (Seidenberg 2015, 255). Pope Francis teaches that we humans all belong to a kind of “universal family” which is to say to the universe at large (section 89). Part III of the Encyclical is entitled “The Mystery of the Universe.”

The pope criticizes the “unhealthy dualisms” that “left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history and disfigured the Gospel.” In contrast, Jesus himself “is far removed from philosophies which despised the body, matter and the things of this world.” For he lived “in full harmony with creation” and “his appearance was not that of an ascetic set apart from the world, or of an enemy to the pleasant things of life” (section 98). He invokes the Scriptural passages that are famous as texts of the Cosmic Christ when he cites Colossians 1: “All things have been created through him and for him” and the prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1–18) that “reveals Christ’s creative work as the Divine Word (Logos).” In this way “the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without hereby impinging on its autonomy” (section 99). Divinity is present in all beings, “the very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant

presence” (section 100). Pope Francis invokes his Jesuit brother, Teilhard de Chardin, when he speaks of how “the ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ” (section 83 and note).

Via Negativa in Laudato Si'

We have seen that the *Via Positiva* is dealt with in considerable depth and breadth in this encyclical. What about the *Via Negativa*? That is clearly in evidence also as the Pope reports the demise of the planet as we know it. His list is familiar to all who have been watching the planet suffering for decades. He speaks to the “pollution produced by residue, including dangerous waste, much of it non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive.” He decries a “throwaway culture” where “the Earth, our home is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” (sections 21, 22). He invokes “a very solid scientific consensus” around the issue of climate warming and a “constant rise in the sea level, an increase of extreme weather events,” a concentration of greenhouse gases and more (section 23). Deforestation, the extinction of the planet’s biodiversity, shortage of drinking water, the loss of tropical forests and more (sections 23, 24). Animals, plants, and humans are migrating as a result and there has been “a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation” (section 25). The extinction of mammals and birds, fungi, algae, worms, insects, and reptiles contributes to the destruction of entire ecosystems (section 34). He might have invoked the archetype I offered twenty-eight years ago, that the Christ is being crucified all over again as we despoil the Earth and her good creatures (Fox 1988, 144–48).

We undergo debasement as we feel the debasement of the Earth and “God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement” (section 89). Yes, the Cosmic Christ is being crucified on the cross all over again.

Via Creativa in Laudato Si'

But the Pope’s message is not exclusively of doom and gloom—though it does urge us to throw off denial and to pay attention to the pain of Mother Earth. This is evident from his many invocations of the *Via Positiva* that we listed above. But he turns to the *Via Creativa* as well—our vast potential as a species to make a difference and to create new ways of living on the Earth. He invokes the word “creativity” at least sixteen times in this encyclical in passages such as the following. The Holy Spirit possesses an “infinite creativity,” he assures us, and we share in that creativity (section 80). “Human creativity cannot be suppressed”

but it needs to be put to the use “of the service of others” because “it is “a form of power involved in considerable risks” (section 131). It is this “admirable creativity” that inspires people to make a difference in combatting the forces of industrialization and more that are destroying the planet and to build cities that are respectful of humans and environment alike (sections 148, 152). He calls on institutions to “stimulate creativity” (I hope he has the church in mind as well when he says this) (section 177) and criticizes those who would “stifle creativity” (section 191). To live more mindfully of the needs of the Earth and commit to lifestyles of greater simplicity will result in a “generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings” (section 211). Indeed, the very crisis of our times requires an “ecological conversion [that] can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving” the world’s problems (section 220).

Via Transformativa in Laudato Si

The Via Transformativa is everywhere in this encyclical since it is a call to action and not just to analysis. The basics of the encyclical are pretty well known now and essentially they are as follows. The ecological crisis of our times, the despoiling of Mother Earth, parallels the despoiling of the poor on the planet. It derives from both a perverted view of the world and economic and political structures that carry on this perversion which is evident in the unsustainable income extremes of the super-rich and the poor as well as indifference to the greed, waste, and materialism that a consumer society generates. We live in an interconnected world and it is high time we started acting like it, seeking a common good and not just a private hoarding.

There is no “room for the globalization of indifference” because the current state of affairs has “caused sister Earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course” (sections 52, 53). The problems lie in the structures themselves and “we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis.” Pope Francis points out that the “techno-economic paradigm” is capable of overwhelming “not only our politics but also freedom and justice” (section 53).

He is explicit about the ineffective and indeed destructive economic system that dominates our planet. “Economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment” (section 56). The avalanche of denial arises because “distractions constantly dull our consciousness of just how limited and finite our world really is.” The market is in fact an idol, a “deified market,” which we are taught to worship and not question as if it were the only economic option humanity has (section 56).

He identifies “sin” with the rupture we have from creation (as well as the Creator and one another) (section 66). He repeats a summons to solidarity “and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters” while recognizing in them “an appreciation of their immense dignity” (section 158). And he wisely speaks to the topic of “justice between the generations” and how future generations are depending on us and are in every way related to us, calling for an “intergenerational solidarity” which is “not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.” The environment is ours “on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next,” he says, citing a statement from the bishops of Portugal (section 159).

The *Via Creativa* is meant to inform the *Via Transformativa* and the Pope sees this. Pope Francis believes that our generation is very much involved in “the pains of childbirth” as we try to learn anew how to cooperate with the Creator, that “God can bring good out of the evil we have done” since the Holy Spirit is so powerfully creative (section 80). We, having been made in the “image and likeness” of the Creator, are therefore co-creators with Divinity. Divinity depends on us to bring compassion to the Earth and all our relationships therein. The Holy Spirit wants to work through us, wants to inspire and awaken our intuitions and inform our hands and minds to get to the work of eco-justice as well as social justice. As I put it in my book on creativity, it is there, in the act of our being creative, that the divine and the human meet (Fox 2002). There lie Pope Francis’s hope and ours, that we can change our ways, that we are endowed with immense intelligence and creativity, that if we pull out of denial and away from destructive economic systems and relationships and beyond a dulled consciousness, anything is possible. Or, I might add, citing eco-philosopher David Orr, “Hope is a verb with the sleeves rolled up” (2009). We can go to work, and we must.

It is clear from this walk-through of Pope Francis’s encyclical that creation spirituality is alive and well in today’s Vatican. How would it be otherwise with St. Francis of Assisi the patron saint of the hour? The four paths are clearly expressed in much depth and clarity in this encyclical. So too are the concepts of Original Blessing and the Cosmic Christ and interdependence which are pillars to creation spirituality, along with a deep sense of ecumenism or interfaith.

Regarding the latter, there are explicit references to respecting the culture and wisdom of indigenous peoples (sections 145, 146, 158). Unfortunately, and in opposition to the Pope’s own words, the Vatican went ahead and canonized the great colonizer-in-chief and racist par excellence Friar Junipero Serra, who set up the mission system in California that enslaved thousands of Native Americans in the nineteenth century (Fogel 1988; Castillo 2015). It is a pity that the Pope failed to walk his talk and listen more deeply to his

own preaching when it comes to Native Americans—and *to listen to them*. But the lesson is clear: Popes too can be very, very fallible. Like the rest of us.

The fact that creation spirituality has moved from being labeled “dangerous and deviant” by two papal administrations who reigned for thirty-four dark years to being front and center in this important encyclical on eco-theology and the survival of the planet within one generation is surely a sign of hope as well.

HOW PREMODERN CONSCIOUSNESS ADDRESSES THE MODERN SPLIT BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION: CREATION SPIRITUALITY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Thomas Berry theorized that much of the pessimism toward nature that emerges so powerfully in the beginning of the modern era in Europe (consider the writings of John Calvin and Martin Luther, for example) occurred because of the Black Death that struck Europe in the fourteenth century. Like the AIDS epidemic, it seemed to arrive out of nowhere and brought about a sudden and ugly death to millions, wiping out about 30 percent of the European population. This, Berry feels, sowed deep distrust in nature and led to the demise of creation spirituality and the rise of anthropocentrism in religion and even contributed in part to scientism and the materialistic worldview.

I see the year 1600 as decisive in the religion–science split. Why is that? First, because that is the year (February 17 to be exact) that the Roman Catholic Church burned the ex-Dominican friar Giordano Bruno at the stake following seven years of incarceration and torture by the Inquisition. It was also the beginning of a “jubilee year” called by the Pope. Sixteen years later Galileo Galilei’s work would draw the attention of the same Inquisitor (Cardinal Bellarmine) who pursued Bruno to his dire end (Rowland 2008). What was Bruno’s great sin? He had promoted the teachings of Copernicus and attempted to integrate them with the Catholic faith—not unlike his Dominican brother Thomas Aquinas who, 350 years earlier, tried to do the same with the teachings of Aristotle. (It is often forgotten that Aquinas was condemned three times following his death and previous to his canonization as a saint.)

I think that consciously or unconsciously, after Bruno’s dire end, science, having witnessed religion’s fierce side in that episode as well as in the sixteenth century religious wars which would soon spill over into the thirty year war, worked out a sort of truce with religion. Said science: “Why don’t you believers take the soul? And we will take the cosmos.” With that science forged ahead to explore, quite literally, the powers of the universe (including, eventually, atomic power) but often without a well developed conscience to temper its technological know-how. Religion meanwhile went along with the deal since it was set up for this kind of bifurcation by

neo-platonists like St. Augustine who defined “spirit” as “whatever is not a body” (Bourke 1978, 92), who saw all nature as “fallen” and therefore unimportant, and who, the Nobel prize-winning chemist Michael Polanyi said, “destroyed interest in science all over Europe for a thousand years” (Polanyi 1962, 141).

Some religionists—those in the fundamentalist camp of Augustine then and today—went happily along with the split between cosmos and psyche until religion became sillier and sillier, more and more introspective, and more and more preoccupied with “sin” (seldom with evil). The result? Gregory Bateson suggested that religion and education were both “rotting the mind” (Bateson 1979, 109) and Teilhard de Chardin observed that “Because it is not sufficiently moved by a truly human compassion, because it is not exalted by a sufficiently passionate admiration for the universe, our religion is becoming enfeebled” (Teilhard de Chardin 1968, 262).

The split between science and spirituality in the modern era did more than just unleash wars between scientists and theologians. It also damaged the soul and rendered society quite ill. Indeed, one could argue that today’s ecological crisis is traceable at least in part to the loss of the sense of the sacredness of creation that was brought about surely by capitalist and industrial exploitation of the Earth but also by the denigration of the Earth and promulgation of anthropocentrism (accurately named “narcissism” by Pope Francis) in which religion often participated. The “neurotic” and excessively “introspective” question “am I saved?” became more important than the question “how are we relating to creation?” None other than the great Biblical scholar Krister Stendahl has labeled the “am I saved?” question “neurotic” and “not biblical” (Stendahl 1976, 78f.).

Here is how philosopher and poet M. C. Richards put the subsequent situation deriving from the divorce of psyche and cosmos: “The ordinary so-called science and so-called religion of our day, in the civilization of the West, tend to conduct a cold war of their own. They attempt to co-exist and to divide the world between them. There is palpable disunion. This split obstructs the poetic consciousness; it is a characteristic malady of our society. Warring impulses beset the personality. . . . The inner soul withdraws, goes underground, splits off from the part that keeps walking around. Vitality ebbs. Psychic disturbance is acute. Suicide may be attempted” (Richards 1962, 60).

Psychologist Otto Rank observed that, when religion lost the cosmos in the West, society itself became neurotic and we had to invent psychology to deal with the neurosis (Rank 1941). Both witnesses, Richards and Rank, are laying bare the price we have paid for the split beginning in the seventeenth century. The situation is pathological. When people are bent on destroying their own home, their own nest, they are diseased and become worshippers of false idols and the society they create will bear such pathology. Such a society will be marked by vast holes in the human soul; addiction will

be its primary religion; in Adrienne Rich's term, a "fatalistic self-hatred" will mark the times (Rich 1976, 215); despair and pessimism will rule; a shrinking of the soul will occur.

In contrast to Augustine's radically dualistic understanding of spirit, one that most scientists would find uninviting and unfriendly (to put it benignly), Thomas Aquinas defined "spirit" as the "*élan* or vitality in everything." Whether tree or horse or blade of grass or bird or cheetah or ocean or river or galaxy, spirit is everywhere: Wherever there is energy or *élan*. How close is this to $E = mc^2$?

Nor is Aquinas alone. The entire creation spirituality tradition thinks this way. Meister Eckhart, who was a Dominican standing on Aquinas's shoulders, and who was fifteen years old when Aquinas died, says "nature is grace"—which utterly destroys Augustine's dualisms (Fox [1980]2000, 94–95). He also declares that "every creature is a word of God and a book about God" (Fox [1980]2000, 61). Of course a "word of God" is a technical term for Logos or the Cosmic Christ and to say that every creature is a word of God is to say that every creature is another Christ. To say that every creature is a book about God is to say that every creature is a Bible and to study creatures—as scientists do—is to study revelation. Aquinas said, "Revelation comes in two volumes—Nature and the Bible" (Fox [1992]2003, 59).

It is this revelation of nature that has been so lacking in the text-based, printing press–driven religion and theology of the modern era (born as it was at the birth of the printing press) and that has in so many ways killed the premodern consciousness which Eckhart, Aquinas, Francis of Assisi, and Hildegard of Bingen all represented. These premodern creation-based mystics have more in common with Native American consciousness than they do with modern religiosity; they are not anthropocentric but begin with the cosmos. Creation. The universe. The whole. One of the characteristics of postmodern thought is that it "begins with the whole," as physicist David Bohm testifies (Bohm 1992, 390). There is a special alliance between premodern and postmodern thinking and this is part of that relationship.

Other teachings of Augustine such as his teaching of original sin (which frankly became far more important to the Western church after he died than it was to him) is also radically anthropocentric, for only humans sin. Today, to begin religion with news of original sin is to leave out 13.8 billion years of history and God's unfolding in the universe; it is to settle for anthropocentrism. (This teaching is also false considering that the Jewish tradition rejects original sin and no Jew believes in it and certainly not Jesus [Fox 1983[2000], 47–53]). Augustine in the fourth century was the first person to use the term but it stuck fiercely. It reinforces patriarchal pessimism, and it becomes a very useful device for constructing an empire (the church having inherited the failing Roman Empire in the fourth

century) and that is why it has hung around so long. It has become reincarnated in a secular version more recently in the form of consumer capitalism which, like original sin, assures everyone they are unworthy to be here and incapable of finding wholeness within but must “purchase” it by outside redemption, in this case buying things. Consumerism as salvation, as messiah, an outsid Savior.

ON THE NOBILITY OF THE SCIENTIST’S VOCATION

Thomas Aquinas did not write a single book on Plato or on Augustine but he wrote ten books commenting on Aristotle. He devoted his adult life to integrating the work of the scientist recognized as the greatest of his day—Aristotle—into the Christian faith (even though Aristotle was a “pagan” and came to medieval Europe via Islam). He tells us why he preferred Aristotle to Plato: “Aristotle’s doctrine, rather than Plato’s, is corroborated by experience,” he wrote (Fox [1992]2003, 23). Aquinas undertook this very controversial move because he held science and scientists in great esteem. He said, “An error concerning the creation results in false thinking about God” (Fox [1992]2003, 22).

Surely, this thinking elevates the vocation of the scientist immeasurably. Turn it around: Does an insight about creation result in an insight about God? Do scientists not contribute then to our understanding of Divinity in a deep way? It would seem so.

I propose in my book *The Reinvention of Work* that, while Luther wrote about “the priesthood of all believers,” it is time to consider *the priesthood of all workers* (Fox 1994). If humans are doing good work then they are midwives of grace and that is what, archetypally speaking, a priest is. Let us consider how the scientist not only travels the spiritual journey of the four paths like the rest of us but also contributes substantively to that journey. I will call upon presenters at IRAS 2017 in particular in this brief excursion.

The Via Positiva in Science

The roles of beauty, awe, wonder, gratitude, and reverence are aroused by the Via Positiva. We have seen above how physicist Paul Carr has sought to recover beauty as an essential category in scientific thought and in its dialogue with religion.

It may well be that the scientist’s primary task is to awaken a sense of awe and wonder. It is constantly doing so—from the world of the microcosm to the vast world of the macrocosm (learning last summer that the universe is two trillion galaxies large) and everything in between, awe abounds. Indeed, in my book *Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh* (Fox [1999]2016), I begin by laying out in three chapters a veritable litany of awe of first the cosmic flesh, second the eco flesh, and third the human flesh that contemporary science has presented to us. Years ago, I had a

dream that was what Native Americans would call a “big dream,” that is to say it was intended for the greater community and not just for me. In it there was this sentence: “There is nothing wrong with the human race today except one thing: You have forgotten the sense of the sacred.” This is important information, and it is amazing to be told that we can cure humanity’s illness by just one medicine: recovering a sense of the sacred.

How do we do that? Science has a great role to play in the process. Consider how geologist Thomas Berry insists that a new cosmology contributes greatly to recovering of a sense of the sacred. Says he: “We will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred only if we appreciate the universe beyond ourselves as a revelatory experience of that numinous presence whence all things come into being. Indeed, the universe is the primary sacred reality. We become sacred by our participating in this more sublime dimension of the world about us” (Berry 1999, 49). Berry is drawing a powerful conclusion from the new creation story from science. It is a reunion of psyche and cosmos that will save us. He is also implicitly praising the vocation of the scientist. But what is also being said is this: the modern era in which religion was cut off from the cosmos brought about a demise of the sense of the sacred. Our postmodern era needs to heal this rupture.

By paralleling our “sense of wonder” with “our sense of the sacred” Berry is also underscoring the need to recover mysticism because mysticism, as we have seen, begins with the *Via Positiva*, that is with the experience of awe, wonder, and what Rabbi Heschel called “radical amazement.” Indeed, Berry ascribes the *Via Positiva* to the very heart of creation itself when he writes the following:

The human venture depends absolutely on this quality of awe and reverence and joy in the Earth and all that lives and grows upon the Earth. . . . In the end the universe can only be explained in terms of celebration. It is all an exuberant expression of existence itself. . . . We must feel that we are supported by that same power that brought the Earth into being, that power that spun the galaxies into space, that tilt the sun and brought the moon into its orbit. (Berry 1999, 166, 174)

Clearly, today’s cosmology provides a healing to the divorce between religion and science and between psyche and cosmos that has so dominated Western culture since the fateful year of 1600. In naming “celebration” as the primary explanation for the universe, Berry, who often invoked his namesake Thomas Aquinas in his talks, is carrying on Aquinas’s teaching who said: “Sheer joy is God’s and this demands companionship” (Fox [1992]2003, v). The reason for the universe in Aquinas’s understanding was joy. And with it community and companionship because joy seeks to be shared.

Another way to recover a sense of the sacred was taught me by Lakota teacher Buck Ghosthorse who said to me one day: “Do you want to know

how sacred water is? Go without it for three days and three nights.” Fasting is another way to recover a lost sense of the sacred. Today, as more and more peoples are facing drought (my own state of California just went through a seven-year drought), a sort of enforced fasting, perhaps our respect and indeed reverence for water might return. Such reverence for the sacredness of water applies of course to sacredness for air, healthy soil, forests, animals, fishes, rivers, oceans, and more that have been so often taken for granted during the modern era of “extractive capitalism” (Klein 2014).

The fact that so many meditation practices, in both East and West, focus on the breath—the holy breath not to be taken for granted, the holy breath that in Biblical languages and many other languages of the world is identical to the word for *spirit*—this too is a practice to return the sense of the sacred. A mystic is one who does not take for granted. An ecological crisis happens when we have been taking for granted too long. Such a crisis is a wake-up call. Water is a grace; air is a grace; animals are a grace; land is a grace; the seasons are a grace; the oceans and rivers are a grace; and so on. Eckhart’s teaching that “nature is grace” comes home to roost.

The Via Negativa in Science

The telling of the truth of how Earth and her creatures are suffering in our time due to climate change is, by itself, a journey into the Via Negativa, the dark night of the soul that today has become a dark night of the planet. Of course it is science’s task to unveil the facts of global warming, of glaciers melting, of seas rising, of weather patterns changing that will affect us all. Without these painful facts, we cannot address solutions.

I will cite a few examples from the IRAS Conference of 2017. In his presentation, Paul Carr emphasized that a darker Arctic is boosting global warming. Since 1979, less reflecting ice and more absorbing water have made the North Pole warm twice as fast as the rest of the Earth. Carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane, nitrous oxide, and viruses are released as the frozen tundra melts. Massive phytoplankton blooms have been observed which increase the absorption of sunlight and amplify arctic warming. Major fisheries are being displaced. Sea levels are rising as mountain glaciers melt in Greenland and Antarctica. Oceans are becoming more acidic from CO₂ absorption, threatening the bottom of the food chain. Weather extremes are increasing with wet areas becoming wetter and floods increasing while dry areas become drier with subsequent droughts and wildfires on the rise. Thus “climate refugees” are on the rise—and Syria is a concrete example of what happens when farmers migrate from land that has become unfarmable to the cities. Tick-borne Lyme Disease and other diseases increase as winters warm (Carr 2017, 4ff).

Part of the Via Negativa is letting go. Letting go is endorsed by urging more and more people to prefer plant-based food to animal-based food as well as choosing to limit the size of families since the human population is exploding beyond the finite capacity of Earth to sustain us.

Part of the Via Negativa is the letting go of images and sensory input that happens in meditation. This is also the calming of the reptilian brain since reptiles are more adept at solitude than they are at bonding, for example. Science is more and more exploring the real physiological results that happen in meditation practices, practices that people have undergone for centuries in both the East and the West. This new branch of science, often called “contemplative science,” finds that “mindful awareness promotes neural integration” (Tsomo 2016, 142–51).

The Via Creativa in Science

Peter Kelley, whose expertise is wind power, spoke at IRAS of how we could place floating islands of wind farms ten miles off the Eastern United States where they would not be in anyone’s back yard or even be visible from the mainland and that from the energy powered by the turbines we could provide electricity for all of North America thus eliminating all coal, gas, and oil fossil fuels so doing.

Another speaker related that by quadrupling the capacity of our batteries (and we have already doubled the capacity so we are half way there) we could provide electricity especially for southern continents, and thus these cultures could essentially leapfrog over the industrial revolution and truly enter the solar age.

Carr points out that a sodium-glass battery can store three times more capacity than the current lithium-ion battery and that research is continuing on that important project. He also advocates for thorium molten-salt nuclear reactors (MSR), which consume nearly 100 percent of their fuel, compared with 3 percent for older reactors with solid uranium fuel. They eliminate the need for storage by consuming nuclear waste and are of *no weapons value*. Thorium fuel is more abundant and cheaper than uranium and requires no expensive containment since the reactors operate close to atmospheric pressure. They have a zero chance of a meltdown. China is investing \$350 million over five years to develop molten-salt thorium reactors. He sees thorium as the green energy source for the future (Carr 2017, 13).

The Via Transformativa in Science

To find a balance again, a homeostasis, with Mother Earth is in fact the work of justice and eco-justice, and all technology and all inventions and all science should be pointing us in those directions. Only a just world can be sustainable. Caring, compassion, and justice matter, and they are

possible provided we do not wallow in despair. Hope is about the possible and despair is about the impossible, as Thomas Aquinas teaches. Science and scientists need to continue to press the possible and pursue it with the warrior energy of hunter gatherers of old. In this sense science can actually lead the way in bringing back the healthy masculine which is so needed today. The archetype of the hunter-gatherer working on behalf of the whole community is one of the central archetypes of the sacred masculine (Fox 2008, 43–76). This is part and parcel of the nobility of the scientist's vocation.

These are just a few examples of how applying the four paths to the vocation of the scientist helps to underscore the intimate work of the scientist's vocation in the very survival of our species along with the many others we love and cherish and share the Earth with today.

COSMIC CHRIST, BUDDHA NATURE, AND IMAGE OF GOD AS RELIGIOUS ARCHETYPES OF THE SACRED

In Christianity, the prime archetype for the inherent sacredness of all things is the Cosmic Christ archetype. So out of touch with Christianity's roots are modern believers that for many of them the term "Cosmic Christ" is a totally new concept; for still others it speaks of "New Age." Nothing could be further from the truth; the Cosmic Christ is spoken of frequently in the *earliest sources of Christianity*, namely Paul's epistles and the Gospel of Thomas, both written well before the four gospels (Fox 1988; Fox and Andrus 2016). Teilhard de Chardin, himself a scientist, mystic, poet, and priest, complained that he could not find anyone—lay person or theologian—who wanted to talk about the Cosmic Christ. Christianity during the modern era, so cut off and alienated from the cosmos, shrunk the original cosmic message of its origins into anthropocentric preoccupations with sin and redemption and the person of Jesus but cut off from creation.

In Buddhism a parallel teaching to the Cosmic Christ is found in the concept of the "Buddha Nature" that is to be found in all beings. In Judaism, there is the tradition of *tselem* or the "Image of God" which a contemporary Jewish scholar, Rabbi David Seidenberg, has concluded is found not just in the human but in all beings as the "pattern that connects" (an identical phrase used by Paul for the Cosmic Christ) (Seidenberg 2015, 255). Hinduism speaks of "all creation as Brahman" (Iyengar 1966, 54) and celebrates how "the Lord enters into every atom, every planet, and every living being" (Prabhupada 1989, 728). The Cosmic Christ is the light in all beings (science assures us there are photons or light waves in all atoms in the universe) and the light of God in all beings (cf. "I am the light of the world," words uttered not by the historical Jesus but by the Cosmic Christ). The Cosmic Christ names then the Sacred found

not only in the microcosm but also in the macrocosm, that is in all of creation.

Albert Einstein called for the “third era of religion” to emerge and here is how he envisioned the arrival of that age. Humanity for Einstein, as interpreted by William Hermanns, is

now moving into the third phase of religious experience: cosmic religion. With his growing knowledge of the vastness of the universe and its trillions of stars, each one many times larger than our planet, stars whose light takes hundreds of years to reach our eyes, man must consider it an insult when he is told that his conduct should be motivated by fear of punishment or hope of reward. And it is just as much an insult to the God who created all these marvels, to be lowered to a human level. The true religious genius has always been endowed with this sense of cosmic religion. . . . This oneness of creation, to my sense, is God, This concept of God will unite all nations. . . . A new age of peace will be inaugurated when all people profess a cosmic religion, when the youth have become laymen with scientific minds. (Hermanns 1983, 68–69)

The Cosmic Christ archetype is a reminder of the holiness of all being. “Isness is God,” said Meister Eckhart (Fox [1980]2000, 89) and “Everything that is is holy,” said the late Catholic monk Thomas Merton (Merton 1962, 21). Poet Mary Oliver summarizes this insight powerfully in her poem “At the River Clarion,” wherein the river and the rock and the moss beneath the rock all profess that “they are part of holiness” (Oliver 2009, 51–52). Premodern theologian Hildegard of Bingen celebrates the reality that “God’s Word is in all creation, visible and invisible.” That Word “is living, being, spirit, all verdant greening, all creativity.” And music itself! (This is confirmed by today’s science that tells us all atoms in the universe are vibrating.)

With the marriage of creation spirituality, including the return of the archetype of the Cosmic Christ, and the acknowledgement of the priestly vocation of scientists (and others who are midwives of grace) and the naming of the four paths of the spiritual journey, we are at the edge of a true and global renaissance, a rebirth of humanity based on a spiritual vision. It is arriving none too soon for we have our work cut out for us. A “good work” (Schumacher 1980); a “great work” (Berry 1999); a work that can and will bring hope (Orr 2009).

EVIL AND OBSTACLES TO FACING CLIMATE CHANGE

Psychologist Carl Jung warned us that evil will become unmasked in the twenty-first century and will be on the table for all to see, no longer hidden under the table. But, he asks, will we have the will to deal with it? Let us consider briefly some of the more egregious doors that open to evil and climate change.

Denial

Today in the United States many are in denial—especially those making big bucks on the current crisis and politicians who are kept by them. About kept politicians, let me tell a brief story. In January, 2016, I was invited to be part of a conference on climate change and seas rising with religious leaders who gathered in Florida. The opening talk was a presentation by a scientist who had slides of Florida today; slides of Florida ten years from now; twenty years from now; and so on. Those images showed big chunks of Florida going under water and disappearing with each decade. Needless to say, it was a sobering opening for a conference and I was the next speaker. When I rose to face the audience I saw people slumped in their chairs like dishrags, utterly overwhelmed by the facts. I took up the topic of *denial* and what a powerful spiritual option denial is. Meister Eckhart says “God is the denial of denial” (Fox [1980]2000, 193). To me this tells us that to wallow in denial is to expel divinity; divinity cannot flow if denial reigns; truth cannot flow if denial reigns. And in Florida at that time, among the political class, denial did indeed reign.

Two famous Floridians were running for president at that time—Jeb Bush and Senator Marco Rubio—and both were in denial about climate change and seas rising. In addition, the governor, Mr. Scott, had recently put out a memo to all state workers (one that has since been repeated by the Trump administration) that they were not allowed to use the word “climate change” in any emails regarding Floridian official business. At the same time that these three politicians were in public denial (along with their entire party) about climate change, sidewalks in south Miami had four inches of water on them from the rising seas.

Ah! The power of denial! A profound spiritual evil in our times. Thomas Aquinas said in the thirteenth century that to choose to be ignorant of something one ought to know about is a mortal sin, that is to say a deadly virus that will spread through one’s own soul and society as a whole.

Pope Francis is not in denial. Nor is he beholden to the financial forces that are selling denial (consider that Exxon-Mobil, of which Donald Trump’s first secretary of state was chief executive officer for twenty years, has been peddling bad science that climate change is a hoax while knowing full well behind the scenes that it is not). And Francis’s encyclical, strong and science-based, is very much trying to urge others out of complacency and certainly out of denial. We know the Pope is being heard because a Fox News commentator declared, on hearing of this encyclical, “Pope Francis is the most dangerous man on the planet.” Congratulations, Pope Francis! Fox News has spoken with its usual wisdom . . . and fear. What a compliment!

It is like creation spirituality being denounced some years ago by the Inquisitor General under Pope John Paul II (Cardinal Ratzinger) as

“dangerous and deviant.” A feather in our cap! A badge of honor we have tried to wear lightly and humbly all these years. When those who set out to destroy liberation theology, silence 106 theologians, dumb the church down deliberately, ignore and cover up pedophile priests, elevating one (Father Maciel) to special trips in the Vatican plane and special ordinations in St. Peter’s Square, call Protestants not-Christian churches, forbid Catholics to practice yoga because it gets you “too much in touch with your body,” and so on—when a person of this kind calls your work “dangerous and deviant” you take the compliment with grace. These and other facts, including the role of the US Central Intelligence Agency and Pope John Paul II’s Vatican linking up to attack liberation theology and its communities in Latin America, the pushing of the fascist organization Opus Dei by two popes over a thirty-four-year period, and the silencing of 106 theologians (of which I was only one) are well documented in my book *The Pope’s War* (Fox 2009).

So it is with Pope Francis’s new encyclical. When Rush Limbaugh calls the Pope “Marxist”—even though Francis has predicted this would happen and has pointed out on several occasions that he is speaking from the values of the gospel and not of Karl Marx as such (though let us never forget Marx comes from the tradition of the Jewish prophets as did Jesus)—then the Pope finds himself in good company with so many others that ignorant and loudmouthed Rush Limbaugh has diced.

Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is alive and well in our time among politicians and so-called religious leaders who turn their back on science and on the reality of climate change while wearing their so-called Christianity on their sleeves for all to see. I have written a public letter to House Speaker Paul Ryan about exactly that reality, given that he claims to be a practicing Catholic but seems to completely ignore *Laudato Si’*, its message and moral imperatives, as well as Pope Francis’s call to heed a “preferential option for the poor” (Fox 2017). According to his encyclical, the poor today include the Earth and her creatures, so often without a voice in human and corporate decision making.

Apathy

Some twenty-three years ago, I was invited to speak at the Schumacher Lectures in Bristol, England. My talk followed one by Lester Brown of the Worldwatch Institute who said that we had twenty years left to change direction as a species or we would not survive. He ended his talk by saying that the number one obstacle to an environmental revolution was apathy. Then it was my turn to speak. The premodern term for apathy is the capital sin of *acedia* which we have mistranslated during the industrial era as “sloth” but in fact includes apathy, despair, boredom, tedium, and

depression. Aquinas defines it as “the lack of energy to begin new things” (Fox [1992]2003, 184). It is so prevalent today that we have a new word for it: couchpotatoitis. What is the cure to this sin? Aquinas says *zeal* (which is the opposite of *acedia* or apathy) comes from an “intense experience of the beauty of things” (Fox [1992]2003, 114–15). Yes, we are back to the *Via Positiva*, back to beauty, back to falling in love and de-anthropocentrizing that term so that it embraces falling in love with rocks and rivers, animals and birds, oceans and rivers, soil and air.

Greed

I know of no spiritual tradition that countenances greed or avarice. All caution against its power to overwhelm us. Thomas Aquinas put it this way: “The greed for gain knows no limit and tends to infinity.” Greed by nature accepts no limits. He goes on: “Unnatural desire is altogether infinite. Hence one who desires riches may desire to be rich, not up to a certain limit, but to be simply as rich as possible” (Fox [1992]2003, 488). This seems to me to name quite bluntly prevailing mythologies we hear and often accept uncritically in these late capitalist times. Mythologies such as “prosperity rules for everyone, all you have to do is ask”; or the notion that it is a good thing that a new version of automobile, refrigerator, style of clothes, and so on appears every year; or that the true test of an economic system is a constantly growing gross national product; or that the less developed countries ought to imitate the overly developed countries regarding material goods (it would take four Earths to hold all our stuff if that were to happen); or that there is unlimited space on the land or in the sea to dump all our junk (including nuclear waste and other toxic materials that will be around for hundreds of thousands of years), and so on. Pope Francis, among others, has attacked this quest for the infinite—which must always take place at the expense of others—in starkly blunt terms. How can a very finite Earth sustain a reckless quest for the infinite—be that quest coming from individuals, stockholders, or corporations?

Despair

I felt at the IRAS conference—as I do in society at large today—a considerable amount of angst and creeping despair. The news after all in a time of Trump and in a time of cancelling America’s commitment to the Paris agreements is not at all encouraging. But something deeper may be afoot. The late and authentic Benedictine monk Father Bede Griffith, who oversaw an ashram in India for over fifty years, once said to me that “despair is sometimes a yoga. Many people do not open up to God or to Spirit until they go through the pit of despair.” This is another way of talking about the power of the “dark night of the soul” for transformation.

We are in between times, straddling the modern and postmodern eras. It may be the true end of the modern era, the patriarchal and pessimistic era, the era of a “fatalistic self-hatred” (Rich) and “original sin,” an era of narcissism and anthropocentrism, and an era that banished mysticism and miracles (which Einstein understood as the marvels of existence). In its place we are invited to return to a world of wonders. Are we ready? To realize this is the true essence of religion (Aquinas), to give thanks. To be grateful. Full of thanks and overflowing and ready to roll up our sleeves and go to work (Orr 2009).

An example of the power of hope versus despair can be found in the moving story that writer Scott Russell Sanders relates regarding his teenage son. It seems that he and his seventeen-year-old son were going on a camping trip together and Sanders was thrilled about it—envisioning this as a primary bonding experience between them. But the opposite happened. His son blew up at him, telling his father (who had written extensively about the demise of the Earth), “You’re so worried about the fate of the Earth you can’t enjoy anything. We come to these mountains and you bring the shadows with you. You’ve got me seeing nothing but darkness.” Sanders writes, “Stunned by the force of his words, I could not speak. If my gloom cast a shadow over Creation for my son, then I had failed him” (Sanders 1998, 194). So Sanders took a two-year sabbatical and went hunting/gathering for hope.

In the book that resulted, called *Hunting for Hope: A Father’s Journeys*, Sanders relays some of his findings and how reconnecting to the cosmos (or creation or universe) and thereby recovering the Via Positiva and the sense of the sacredness of creation was key. He writes:

I still hanker for the original world, the one that *makes us* rather than the one we make. I hunger for contact with the shaping power that curves the comet’s path and fills the owl’s throat with song and fashions every flake of snow and carpets the hills with green. It is a prodigal, awful, magnificent power, forever casting new forms into existence, then tearing them apart and starting over. (Sanders 1998, 13)

He tells of a mystical experience he underwent one night when the night sky beckoned him. “I climbed out of the car with a greeting on my lips, but the sky hushed me. From the black bowl of space countless fiery lights shone down, each one a sun or a swirl of suns the whole brilliant host of them enough to strike me dumb.” We need to open ourselves to the “world we have not made” and do so by direct experience. “Only direct experience of Creation will do.” We need faith, but faith in what? “In our capacity for decent and loving work, in the healing energy of wildness, in the holiness of Creation. . . . That the universe exists at all, that it obeys laws, that those laws have brought forth galaxies and stars and planets and—on one planet at least—life, and out of life, consciousness, and out of consciousness these

words, this breath, is a chain of wonders. I dangle from that chain and hold on tight” (Sanders 1998, 14). A chain of wonders indeed!

That is where science and spirituality come together again. The Via Positiva, Via Negativa, Via Creativa, and Via Transformativa come together again. Psychology and cosmos come together again. The divine feminine and the sacred masculine come together again. Awe and the gratitude it awakens leads to justice making and eco-action born from a deep and reverent place.

THE ORDER OF THE SACRED EARTH

I am currently working with others to develop a new spiritual (not religious) order called the Order of the Sacred Earth. When I look at religious history in the West I notice that often when religion is in decline an order springs up. Such was the case in the fourth century with the Desert Fathers and Mothers; and in the fifth century when St. Benedict and St. Scholastica launched the Benedictine Order that did so much to keep learning alive during the Dark Ages; and, at the end of the Dark Ages, when monasticism was too fat and lazy, both Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic rose in the early thirteenth century to offer an alternative version of a Christian way of life. It is noteworthy, however, that their movements were co-opted by religious headquarters; within a generation they were enlisted to oversee an Inquisition. Thus, the need today for a *spiritual* and not religious order—one that is beholden to no religious headquarters but open to all spiritual traditions. In the sixteenth century the Protestant Reformation (whose five hundredth anniversary we remember this year) launched what might be understood as a series of new lay orders which we call denominations. Also in the sixteenth century there arose the Jesuit Order. Today it seems fitting, given the challenges of our times, to birth a new expression of community, a movement called the Order of the Sacred Earth (OSE).

The first directors are Jen Listug, who is twenty-eight, and Skylar Wilson, who is thirty-three, and together we have written a book that lays out the essence of the vision and have invited a number of other people to comment on the idea of the order and what it might provide (Fox et al. 2017). The key to the order is one common vow, namely, “I promise to be the best mystic (that is lover) of Mother Earth and the best warrior or prophet defending Mother Earth that I can be.” Another key is intergenerational wisdom, the coming together of generations to face the great issues of climate change and survival of our and other species.

Anyone feeling resonance with this commitment is welcome, whether they be Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Indigenous, goddess, or atheist. In his foreword to the book, David Korten offers the following invitation and challenge:

Ultimately, other planets may bring forth carbon-based life that evolves to create conditions essential to more complex and able organisms—perhaps even human-like species. Perhaps one among them will acquire greater wisdom and avoid our failure of arrogance.

Yet if any possibility remains that we humans might get it right, let us not go quietly. We are an intelligent, self-reflective species with powerful communication networks. This gives us the capacity to learn, to change, to perhaps become a healer to the Earth we have so abused. It begins with our pledge to be healing lovers and protective warriors. (Fox et al. 2017, 4)

A new school was launched in October 2017 where people can be trained in the creation spirituality tradition and link such awareness to one's own work and profession. It is called the Fox Institute of Creation Spirituality and is headquartered in Boulder, Colorado. It is being birthed by former students of mine and will offer master's and doctoral degrees in creation spirituality as well as certificates, while adhering to the right brain/left brain pedagogy that has been an earmark of our educational philosophy for over forty years (www.foxinstitute-cs.org).

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