

Contribution

Earth-Honoring Faith and the Anthropocene

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Golden Spikes

THE International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS) is the official arbiter of geological time. To map Earth's ages the ICS plants "golden spikes." Geological eras, periods, and epochs begin and end with golden spikes. One of them, marking the boundary between the Cretaceous and the Paleogene, is hammered into a hillside in El Kef, Tunisia.

In 2016 the ICS will make a momentous decision. Is, or is not, a new golden spike warranted? If it is, that spike would end the Holocene Epoch of the Quaternary Period and mark the onset of what has already been christened "the Anthropocene."¹

The notion that Earth has discontinuous ages is quite recent. Classical texts from ancient civilizations both East and West, as well as the sacred scriptures of the oldest religions, omit dinosaurs, mastodons, and even ninety-five percent of human history (hunter-gatherer), to say nothing of Earth's long tenure well before any life appeared, even single-celled creatures. The memory encased in written records is typically of one epoch only, the civilizations of the late Holocene (the past 11,700 years).

Thus it was against the grain of religion, science and philosophy that Jean-Leopold-Nicholas-Frederic (Georges) Cuvier (1769–1832) argued from his small Paris fossil collection that worlds previous to ours existed. "Life on earth has often been disturbed by terrible events," he wrote in the early 1800s, "Living organisms without number have been the victims of these catastrophes."² Nature had changed course, with devastating effect. Cuvier exposed what no one expected—a history of an Earth given to periodic seizures.

If the ICS plants a golden spike in 2016, the Holocene (Greek for "wholly recent") will officially be history. Given geologists' patient sense of time, this decision is anything but casual. It means they, together with climatologists, oceanographers, and other Earth scientists,

have already accumulated sufficient evidence to consider a decisive judgment about a new epoch.

Many scientists are not waiting. Nobel laureate climatologist Paul Crutzen interrupted a geologists' meeting in 2000 that kept referring to the late Holocene as our habitat. "Let's stop [this]," he said. "We are no longer in the Holocene; we are in the Anthropocene." "The Anthropocene" (from *anthropos*, Greek for "human") quickly became the coffee break buzz. After Crutzen's essay "Geology of Mankind" was published in *Nature* magazine, it became the popular topic of numerous scientific journals and popular magazines as well. (*National Geographic's* "Enter the Anthropocene—the Age of Man" appeared in 2011. *The Economist* made the Anthropocene its cover story the same year.)

The International Geosphere—Biosphere Programme had rendered its verdict well before. "The planet is now dominated by human activities," they said in a 2004 volume that announces the Anthropocene. "Evidence from several millennia shows that the magnitude and rates of human-driven changes to the global environment are in many cases unprecedented. There is no previous analogue for the current operation of the Earth system."³

"[N]o previous analogue" means, in this case, that for the first time ever human time has merged with geologic time with sufficient impact to initiate a world unlike any previous one. The "thread of operations [of previous nature] has been broken." Nature has "changed course." (Cuvier)⁴

Meanwhile the ICS itself took official action and established an Anthropocene Working Group to ponder the arrival of the possible new epoch.

That human impacts on the natural world are now orders of magnitude beyond what they were prior to the Industrial Revolution is nowhere doubted. The sole question is whether these geologic-scale events are a dramatic development of the continuing Holocene or the onset of a new epoch. Should the ICS hammer in a new golden spike or not?

For the moment this is the salient point: While Earth has seen wildly varied ages before, and will again before it becomes the cinder of an aging star, *Homo sapiens sapiens* civilizations have inhabited one age only. Our tenure is strictly Holocene. All written human history and all human civilizations to date, starting with neo-lithic settlements, have enjoyed the Holocene's emblem; namely, a warm period of sufficient climate stability to allow, even foster, the triumph of life amid nature's predilection for trying anything once, including ice ages and marshy

polar regions.⁵

Presently, however, the relative climate stability of the Holocene is apparently giving way to the climate volatility of the (prospective) Anthropocene. The specific cause was never intended and is quite startling; namely, humankind has taken to regulating solar radiation and re-engineering planetary surface processes by burning dirty fuels on a massive scale. Since 1950 especially but steadily from 1750 onward, we have been resetting the planet's thermostat and altering the chemistry and dynamics of the atmosphere, oceans and landmasses. The result is a dramatic carbon spike that issues in climate volatility, identified as "accelerated and extreme climate change." Present CO₂ levels in the atmosphere exceed those of the last 800,000 years.⁶ Because of ocean carbon capture, the souring of the seas is proceeding at the fastest rate in the last 8 million years and on a scale not seen in 300 million years.⁷

Of utmost import for philosophy and ethics is that accelerated and extreme climate change, mass extinction, and ocean acidification this time around is *anthropogenic* geophysical change that goes where human agency and responsibility have never before gone—"cumulatively across generational time, aggregately through ecological systems, and nonintentionally over evolutionary futures."⁸ This is a seismic shift in human impact and responsibility for which we have no ethic on the books or in existing moral theory. Cumulative human consequences exceed the time dimensions and space dimensions of present accountability. Were there a "golden spike" to mark the end of one era of human responsibility and the beginning of qualitatively different one, that spike would be hammered in here and now.

The Human Footprint

If this new circumstance were the case for thought experiments only, it might not be dangerous. But this reality is embedded in the daily habits and standing structures of the economy, the political order, law, transportation, and jurisprudence. How we cook our breakfast and obtain the food for it, how we travel to and from work, what clothes we wear and what their global supply line is, and where our money goes for what purposes, all belong to a new order of planetary consequence. The bottom line, however, is that we have in fact arrived at the stand-off laid out by Naomi Klein: "[O]ur economic system and our planetary system are now at war. Or, more accurately, our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction in humanity's use of resources; what our

economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it's not the laws of nature."⁹

If it's "not the laws of nature," then it's "the economic model." That poses the daunting task of transforming global corporate capitalism and its extractive economy.

But before we turn to how we might alter our entrenched model, or consider an alternative economic cosmos, we should summarize late Holocene or early Anthropocene reality. Until the impact of the human in recent decades and centuries sinks in, all discussion of deep transformation risks false analysis and false solutions. Three factors are prominent.

Humanity is now the single most decisive force of nature itself. The *anthropos* ["human"] of the late Holocene or early Anthropocene has modified the flows of most rivers and changed the catchment areas of the world. This *anthropos* has reengineered more rocks, soil, and landscapes in the last century than volcanoes, earthquakes, and glaciers. This *anthropos* is now the main agent in the planet's nitrogen cycle. This *anthropos* now sends innocent species to eternal death at a quickening pace. This *anthropos* is altering the carbon content and dynamic in the acidification of the oceans and the regulation of solar radiation. This *anthropos* may in fact be initiating a geological epoch whose tattoo is mass uncertainty.

In short, the human footprint is everywhere. All the systems of the natural world are either currently embedded as part of human systems or profoundly affected by those systems. This includes places humans do not live—the high atmosphere, the ocean depths, the top-most polar regions.

Our role itself has shifted as natural boundaries are routinely breached. A resident of the planet, us, has become its manager,¹⁰ a single species has become its autocrat. Even nature's preservation requires careful human intervention. Simply "hands off" or benign neglect is no longer possible when "hands on" is the case everywhere, from the Arctic and Antarctic to the equatorial belt.

How far-reaching is the human imprint? Elizabeth Kolbert concludes that *homo sapiens* are a co-evolutionary force. "We are deciding, without quite meaning to, which evolutionary pathways will remain open and which will forever be closed. No other creature has ever managed this, and it will, unfortunately, be our most enduring legacy."¹¹

Nature has changed course in the manner of geological age transitions. On September 21, 2014, 350,000–400,000 people took to the

streets of New York City for The Peoples' Climate March, a march mobilized to send an urgent message to the United Nations' Climate Summit of September 23–24. Indigenous peoples from across the globe participated, backed by a declaration delivered to the UN from the Indigenous Peoples' Council. In a statement of just over two pages the words “sacred,” “sacredness,” and “sanctity” appear 25 times, not least in the title itself: “Beyond Climate Change to Survival on Sacred Mother Earth.” Were “the sacred” and “sanctity” itself the subject, it might have been even more prominent. But “the sacred” is not the subject *per se*—getting beyond climate change to survival is. Much of the text is thus descriptive of changes to “Sacred Mother Earth” that follow from “modern living and all that it encompasses.” “Modern living and all that it encompasses” means the reach of the Industrial Revolution and several centuries of conquest, colonization and “progress.” “The Air is not the same anymore,” the statement reads. “The Water is not the same anymore. The Earth is not the same anymore. The Clouds are not the same anymore. The Rain is not the same anymore. The Trees, the Plants, the Animals, Birds, Fish, Insects and all the others are not the same anymore. All that is Sacred in Life is vanishing because of our actions.”¹² “There is no more time for discussion on preventing ‘Climate Change. That opportunity has passed. ‘Climate Change’ is here.”¹³

“Not the same anymore” is the new normal. A non-analogous Earth moment has arrived.¹⁴

The tattoo of the Anthropocene, if it is our new epoch, appears to be climate volatility and eco-social uncertainty on a global scale. Since the relative climate stability of the late Holocene made possible the rise and spread of agriculture, then settled human civilizations, from ca. 11,000 BCE to the present, the challenge for the Anthropocene becomes that of those transitions required when the “normal” is global eco-social uncertainty. How, amidst climate volatility, do we move from industrial-technological civilization fueled by fossil energy to ecological-technological civilization fueled by low-impact renewable power?

More pointedly, at least for this journal, what does this non-analogous time mean for cosmology and ethics? What would an Earth-honoring and Earth-healing faith be if no natural terrain goes untouched by both human goodness and human molestation and everything turns on our actions and choices? What understanding of ourselves and the world, and what manner of living would take responsibility not only for present and future generations of humankind but for the community of life as a whole, including its generative elements of earth, air, fire, and water?

The Turn to A Culture of Life

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, founder of Buddhist Global Relief, offers a framework. We need not only new technologies for reducing carbon emissions and capturing carbon already in the atmosphere, he writes. We also need a new model and paradigm he labels “a culture of life.” It would replace “the pernicious culture of death” we presently purvey. The culture of life includes a different economic model (see Klein above) but it is even more. It is an understanding of the world and an alternative set of working values. Both are conducive to a “*more integral relationship of people with each other, with nature, and with the cosmos.*” People, nature, and the cosmos are, in Buddhist and most religious traditions, all “*subjects of experience.*” This world of subjectivity contrasts sharply with “the objectifying processes of corporate capitalism.” In the cosmology of corporate capitalism, these very same elements—people, nature, the cosmos itself—are valued as objects for market society and no more.

The essential difference of Bodhi’s world from the commodified and marketized world of global consumerism could not be starker. For him the cosmos itself is “endowed with a profound subjective dimension, even an inherent intelligence by which it can transform stardust into planets that bring forth a profusion of life forms and transform moist clay into conscious beings with feelings and thoughts and ideals and hopes and the innate capacity to reflect the cosmos back upon itself.”¹⁵ The cosmos is alive and sacred, rather than simply useful.

The Roman Catholic Passionist priest, Thomas Berry, highlights Bodhi’s point this way: “The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.”¹⁶ The *Journey of the Universe* project, inspired by Berry and led by Mary Evelyn Tucker of Yale University and Brian Swimme of the California Institute of Integral Studies, is a formidable effort to give voice and vision to these living sacred cosmologies, whether Bodhi’s, Berry’s, or that of the Indigenous People’s Council.¹⁷ It does so through film, interviews with scientists and others, a *Journey* text and curriculum, and multiple networks of actors from varied cultures, religions, and sectors of society.

My own trial attempt, in *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*,¹⁸ is that of a social ethicist working from religious and secular traditions. This attempt, too, aligns with Bodhi’s, Berry’s, the Indigenous People’s Council, and the *Journey of the Universe* project. It, too, rests in reverence and respect for the natural world, together with awareness of its finitude, resilience and power. My attempt also joins

theirs in its “solidarity between peoples everywhere based on empathy, respect, and a shared humanity” and in its efforts to “endorse an ethic of simplicity, contentment, and restraint to replace the voracious malady of consumerism.”¹⁹

To give this cosmology and ethic flesh I proceed along two paths for the remainder of this essay. The first describes the hard transitions needed to move from industrial-technological civilization to ecological-technological civilization. The second is a thought experiment about human responsibility and the sacred at our moment in history. If, with Bohdi, Berry, the Indigenous People’s Council, and *Journey*, we conceived planetary creation as alive and sacred, what might we draw upon to fashion human responsibility for the Anthropocene?

Transitions

Basic reforms and modulations are needed. They include the following:

A *perspectival transition* in which we understand ourselves as a species among species no longer inhabiting the same planet humans has known for a very long while. Altered perception for this changed reality involves a “re-enchantment” of the world that counters what Max Weber called the “disenchantment” by which nature was rendered little more than a repository of resources for human use.²⁰ Reenchantment restores to human consciousness nature as a community of subjects, the womb of all the life we will ever know, the bearer of mystery and spirit, and the ethos of the cosmos.

An *economic transition* in which economics and ecology merge to become “eco-nomics.” Eco-nomics embeds all economic activity within the ecological limits of nature’s changing economy and pursues the three-part agenda of production, relatively equitable distribution, and ecological regenerativity. Growth as a good is not precluded, provided it is ecologically sustainable and regenerative for the long term, reduces rather than increases the instability that large wealth and income gaps generate, and bolsters rather than undermines the capacity of local and regional communities and cultures to nurture and draw wisely upon their cultural and biological diversity.

An *energy transition* that parallels economic policy. Most present attention to energy is about energy resources and use. Do we have enough to do what we want to do, namely, continue to grow the economy to meet human needs? Are we energy-independent and, if not, how will we secure that? How will energy be distributed fairly? These discussions all go on without *first* asking what sources and uses are

mandated by the planet's climate-energy system in the Anthropocene, the way in which the planet regulates the incoming solar heat that keeps Earth from being little more than a barren, frozen rock. Energy policy discussions assume that human energy use is primary and we'll address the downstream effects. (These effects now include the consequences of climate change.) But human primacy and priority is exactly backwards. *Human* energy use is *derivative of the planet's*. The first law of energy, then, is preservation of the planet's climate-energy system as conducive to life. This is the energy parallel to Berry's maxim that the first law of the human economy is preserving nature's economy.²¹

A *demographic* transition in which human population levels off or slowly declines and—equally vital—the negative per person impact on the rest of nature gives way to mutual enhancement with other life. Presently we are far too many, and many of us are far too rich, for the planet to bear, on our terms.

A *polity transition* in which the basic conception of democratic capitalism shifts, if indeed democratic capitalism is retained as viable. The shift is from short-term horizons (the two or four or six year election cycle and the quarterly and annual business report) to horizons that include the well-being of future generations of human and otherkind. The shift is also from a society that fosters virtually unrestricted liberty to acquire and enjoy wealth, in which the right to property and its uses is more basic than the role of government as an equalizing force, to a society that fosters the common good through the process of democratizing social, political, and economic power in such a way that the *true* primary goods of the commons—earth, air, fire, water—are cared-for requisites of a shared good, a good for both present and future generations. The notion is that of “sustainable community” based on the principle of an ancient norm, “subsidiarity.” Subsidiarity asks how economy, environment, and governance are wrapped around local communities and bioregions. As a principle, subsidiarity is always in search of the most appropriate “whole” to address challenges, problems, and uncertainty. But it begins in decentralized fashion with local communities and their assets. If they can address basic needs and meet basic challenges with those assets, no further course need be pursued. If they cannot, or, rather, when and where they cannot, then the effort is made to draw upon or create a more encompassing “whole.” In a contracting world, that whole will often require international cooperation. But subsidiarity's principle is always the same: begin with the local and solve problems at the so-called “lowest” appropriate level with the resources available there. “Consult the genius of the place”²² as

step one.

In contrast to “sustainable development” as global corporate capitalism “greened,” sustainable community based in subsidiarity is the effort to preserve or create the following all together or in part: greater economic self-sufficiency locally and regionally, with a view to the bioregions themselves as basic to human organization; agriculture appropriate to a region and in the hands of local owners and workers using local knowledge and crop varieties, with the ability to save their own seeds and treat their own plants and soils with their own products; the preservation of local and regional traditions, language, and cultures and a resistance to global homogenization of culture and values; a revival of religious life and a sense of the sacred, in place of a way of life that leaches the sacred from the everyday and reduces life to the utilitarian; the repair of the moral fiber of society on some terms other than sovereign consumerism; resistance to the full-scale commodification of things, including knowledge; the internalization of costs to the local, regional, and global environment in the price of goods; and the protection of ecosystems and the cultivation of Earth as “a sacred trust held in common,” to use the language of the Earth Charter.²³

All this is global democratic community, not nativist localism. It is not asking *whether* to “globalize,” but *how*. And the Earth Charter’s answer—democratic community democratically arrived at—is *global* community by virtue of its planetary consciousness and its impressive networking of citizens around the world as made possible by electronic globalization. Adherents of sustainable community have this, rather than “development” in mind, because they are not trying to wrap the global environment around the integrating global economy of corporations. They are asking, “What makes for healthy community on successive levels—local, regional, sometimes national, and global—and how do we achieve a healthy economy and environment together, aware that Earth’s requirements are fundamental?” They are attentive to questions that global capitalism, even as sustainable development, rarely asks: What are the essential bonds of human community and culture, as well as the bonds with the more-than-human world? What is the meaning of such primal bonds for a healthy, concrete way of life? What are cultural wealth and biological wealth and what wisdom do we need to sustain them in the places people live with the rest of life’s community? What kind of decision-making internalizes the prospective needs of future generations?

A policy transition in which policies are as integrated as nature itself.

Climate change, poverty, energy, food, water, and biodiversity loss are interlaced in the planetary economy. None is siloed in reality, so none can be siloed for analysis and solution, either. Integrated policies need to mirror the systemic character of nature's own integral functioning, just as human technologies must cohere with the technologies of the natural world. Because the dual impoverishments of human poverty and the Earth as the new poor are increasingly interwoven, social well-being and ecological health must be addressed together.

And a *cosmological, religious and moral transition* in which, *because* planetary health is primary and human well-being is derivative (Th. Berry), and *because* the common human good depends upon the health of the generative goods of the commons—earth, air, fire, water—the ecosphere as a whole is the relational matrix of our lives and our responsibility. Planet-keeping thereby becomes the common calling of all philosophies and religions in the same moment that the moral framework of ethics is struck in a new key. Religious and philosophical ethics now stretches beyond a fixation on the human species so as to include the biophysical and the geo-planetary. Social justice takes wings as creation justice.²⁴

Sacred Strangers and Deep Traditions

Effecting the hard transitions requires leadership. It also requires an ability to think and act from somewhere beyond industrial civilization's conventional wisdom and drag of normalcy. That leads to our thought experiment: what might we draw upon if we place ourselves in planetary creation as sacred?

We'll look first to leadership, then to what leaders might call upon for their cosmology and ethic.

Decades ago, Howard Becker undertook a study of leaders at inflection points in history, those moments when, like our present Holocene or emerging Anthropocene, the future closes in around something quite different not only from the past but from the present as well. While Becker's study was provoked by secularization rather than the challenge of 7 to 9 billion souls on a hot, crowded, and destabilized planet, his findings are suggestive.

The most effective leaders, he discovered, were not the keepers of the conventional wisdom and the reigning paradigm. These leaders were so captured by their own success that they failed to exit the mind-set and institutions that created wicked problems from that very success. So they were not prepared for the storm that blew in from paradise.

(Working furiously to get the same economy back on track that brings on climate change is an example of the trap we set with “we-know-what-we’re-doing-and-there-is-no-alternative.”)

Instead, the most effective leaders were, to use Becker’s phrase, “sacred strangers in secular society.” Sacred strangers drew on traditions that anchored them in a place beyond the presently popular. At the same time these leaders undertook a revision and expansion of those very traditions. They were outliers and dissenters, yet they were not cynics about either social change or the reform of their cherished faith traditions. A compassionate retreat from the reigning culture and its gods was possible and another way was attainable. Sacred strangers knew what the prophets knew—things can fall apart, and do from time-to-time, *and* new creation can arise.

This sacred stranger profile contrasted with two others. Some leaders abandoned ties to older traditions as they embraced the new. For them, the new displaced the old. They wanted modernity’s freedom, nothing more and nothing else. The march of progress that had issued in modern prosperity and the pleasures of privilege was all that was needed or desired.

The other contrasting cohort was a population whose leaders held fast to the old and, for them, the sacred. They engaged in long and bitter battles against encroaching secularization, only to find themselves with waning influence and deepened alienation. While they felt they had never left home, home had left them.

Distinct from both cohorts, sacred strangers sought new possibilities while drawing upon the values, meanings, and insights of older sacred orders. They drank deeply from the wells of their faith and sub-cultures while, at the same time, they recast inherited understandings. According to Becker these sacred strangers were better grounded and more creative than either those religious persons who clung to a past they felt they were losing or those liberal humanists who assumed that modernity’s well-worn paradigm still had a lock on the future.²⁵

Taking cues from Becker, might communities of sacred strangers aid the common quest for a durable way of life when our paths are not yet trodden and the perils are not yet known? Might communities of the long obedience of discipleship offer a sturdier place to stand, anchored to the good work of ancestors who, in their own time, broke old molds in favor of new resilience? Might planet-keeping in the hands of sacred strangers bring renewable moral-spiritual energy to the journey from industrial to ecological civilization in the Anthropocene?

Only if their faith is genuinely Earth-honoring and Earth-healing.

Such faith takes us to the resources available to sacred strangers in the Anthropocene. Let's call them "deep traditions," since they span time and cultures for as long as human records have existed. Mysticism, prophetic-liberative practices, asceticism, sacramentalism, and the cultivation of wisdom are pan-human and pan-religious. They have sometimes been Earth-honoring but often not. The present work of sacred strangers is to develop their Earth-healing talent so as to counter the Earth-destructive forces that presently put the planet in jeopardy at human hands: consumerism, utilitarianism, alienation, oppression, and folly. A broad-brushed sketch looks like this.

Traditions of asceticism are traditions of saying "yes" and saying "no" in a disciplined way of life that emphasizes spiritual richness and material simplicity. Ascetic traditions that love the Earth fiercely in a simple way of life offer an alternative to global consumerism. The world of consuming passions is countered with the disciplining of desire and a richness of spirit.

Traditions of sacramental imagination regard all material reality (creation) as sacred. It carries a value humans fully share but do not create. The planet might then be viewed as a "sacramental commons." This counters the habits of modern living that treat all nature as marketed commodities for exclusive human use. Such an unrelentingly utilitarian ethic is a modern version of an ancient ethic—master/slave—with us as master and the rest of nature as slave. By way of contrast, for sacramental ethics, the community of all life is viewed as a planetary commons in which the parental elements of earth, air, fire, and water have standing. Their requirements for their own regeneration and renewal become part of "eco-nomics" while their own needs become part of our expanded moral universe.

Mystical experience is a third pan-religious and pan-human experience and tradition. An oceanic feeling prevails in which the human self belongs to "the All." The attention of Earth-honoring faith to mysticism, however, is to the kind of renewable moral energy that accompanies this experience: How does immersion into a transcendent mystical reality lead to *tikkun olam* (Hebrew for "repair of the world")? If the world is a communion of subjects, as mystics claim, what follows for the way nature is treated? The brief answer is that alienation of the human self from the rest of nature is overcome in the experience of all things communing in God, or in "the All," or in whatever mysticism names as the embracing cosmic reality.

The heart of prophetic-liberative traditions is justice-centered faith. Its key is shared power and an unquenchable thirst for life. With justice

for creation viewed as the center of faith and morality, Earth-honoring faith focuses on shared, largely decentralized, power as the means to oppose the oppression that follows from race, class, gender, or cultural privilege. A restructured ethic of power counters the structured oppression of nature, including its human communities.

Wisdom traditions are those universal traditions in which creation is the teacher. Measured human responsibility follows upon creation's disclosures of its changing ways. Wisdom takes the form of varied genre—didactic sayings and stories, puzzling parables and probing questions, poetry and meditation, ritual practices of all kinds, treatises on the mysteries of life and death. In some religious traditions, wisdom is identified as a feminine companion and partner of divinity. Accessible moral instruction is always part of wisdom, as is an awareness of human folly. An awareness of moral tragedy may be present as well, together with the grace of new beginnings.

The sweep of the deep traditions brings to the Earth crisis rooted practices and moral substance for a different cosmology and way of life. What they all share is profound interconnectedness and reverence, what Buddhists call “interbeing” (Thich Nhat Hanh). They also share lively “mixing.” Innumerable practices of diverse indigenous peoples, for example, reject the sharp dualism of nature and culture as they pass along the wisdom of a sacred universe and the mystery of belonging to it. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew cannot instruct in the ways of Orthodox Christian discipleship without braiding asceticism, mysticism, and sacramentalism together. Mohandas Gandhi, drawing from Indian village culture, placed a popular Hindu asceticism in the service of liberative ends. Dorothy Day took her uncompromisingly prophetic stance against war-making and poverty-making into the field, but nurtured it with the sacramental piety of daily mass at the Catholic Worker. Thich Nhat Hanh's engaged Buddhist discipleship joins his ascetic regime and mystical meditation to wisdom and liberative example. From the New York City Mayor's Office, and working with youth, Ibrahim Abdul-Matin views “the Earth [as] a Mosque” and marshals Muslim discipleship to embody Islam as a “Green Deen” (path or way of life). In the state of Connecticut, USA, Adamah Farm trains college youth in organic farming and a ranging Jewish spirituality. Hazon, the largest Jewish environmental organization in the United States, is also the largest single network of Community Supported Agriculture farms (55).

Orchestrating these deep traditions as appropriate to the adaptive challenges of a given time and place is the work of “sacred strangers.”

Those just mentioned are only a few among thousands.

Coda

“Song” is a motif of Earth-honoring faith and a way to image its form as religious ethics in a new key. *The Song* is Earth-honoring and Earth-healing faith, but its expression is never a single melody line. Its music is via innumerable songs, the songs of the world’s faiths and cultures, in every locale as appropriate to place.

The shared song of Earth-honoring faith expresses a fundamental “consent to being.” “Consent to being” is a trust that plants our lives in that arena apart from which we would not be, and cannot be: planetary nature together with the rest of the cosmos. It also plants our lives in soil native to most all religions and cultures, the soil of birth and rebirth, death and renewal, the Phoenix shaking off its ashes. “Consent to being” is a basic trust in the triumph of life, its continuation and renewal, even in non-analogous epochs—such as the Anthropocene.²⁶

Notes

¹ Information from Gayathri Vaidyanathan, “SCIENCE: When did man dominate changes on Earth? A rock-hard question for scientists,” published in *ClimateWire*, pp. 2–3 of the printout of the March 12, 2015, online version, available at www.eenews.net/cw/2015/03/12.

² Elizabeth Kolbert, “The Lost World,” Part Two, *The New Yorker*, December 23 & 30, 2013: 50.

³ W. L. Steffen et al., *Global Change and the Earth System* (Berlin and New York: Springer, 2004), v.

⁴ To view this in graph form, see pages 56–57 of Larry Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (Oxford University Press, 2013). The graphs are used with permission from W. L. Steffen, et al., *Global Change and the Earth System* (Berlin and New York: Springer, 2004), Figure 3.66 and Figure 3.67.

⁵ “The Holocene,” University of California Museum of Paleontology, www.ucmp.berkeley.edu.

⁶ Nicholas Kristoff, ‘Neglected Topic’ Winner: Climate Change, *The New York Times* Sunday Review, January 19, 2014: 11, reporting data from William Nordhaus’s book, *The Climate Casino*.

⁷ From Vaidyanathan, “SCIENCE: When did man dominate changes on Earth?,” *ClimateWire*, p. 2 of printout available at www.eenews.net/cw/2015/03/12.

⁸ Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Georgetown University Press, 2013), 1.

⁹ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 21.

¹⁰ Robert Arthur Stayton, *Power Shift: From Fossil Energy to Dynamic Permanent Power* (Santa Cruz: Sandstone Publishing, 2015), 6.

¹¹ Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry

Holt and Company, 2014), 268–69.

¹² From p. 1 of “Beyond Climate Change to Survival on Sacred Mother Earth,” made available December 9, 2014, by the American Indian Institute Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth, Bozeman, Montana. The declaration was signed by 51 members of the Indigenous Peoples’ Council, representing at least that many different nations.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See the citation above from the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme, cited from W. L. Steffen, et al., *Global Change and the Earth System*, v.

¹⁵ All the citations in this paragraph are from Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Moving from a Culture of Death to a Culture of Life: Preparing for the People’s Climate March,” Vol. 6, No. 3, Fall 2014 issue of “Helping Hands,” the newsletter of Buddhist Global Relief, and obtained online at www.buddhistglobalrelief.org. The citations are from p. 4 of the printed out version. The material in italics is italicized in the original.

¹⁶ Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community* (Sierra Club Books, 2006), 17.

¹⁷ See the following as an introduction to, and text for, this work: Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe* (Yale University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ See Larry Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁹ These are the words of Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Moving from a Culture of Death to a Culture of Life: Preparing for the People’s Climate March,” Vol. 6, No. 3, Fall 2014 issue of “Helping Hands,” p. 4 of the printed out version from www.buddhistglobalrelief.org.

²⁰ See the use of these terms in Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *The Vocation Lectures* (Hackett Classics, 2004). The original, “Wissenschaft als Beruf,” was published in Tübingen (1922) in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 524–55.

²¹ Thomas Berry, “Conditions for Entering the Ecozoic Era,” *Ecozoic Reader 2*, No. 2, (Winter 2002): 10.

²² From the title of the book by Wes Jackson, *Consulting the Genius of the Place* (Counterpoint Press, 2010).

²³ The Earth Charter is available at www.earthcharter.org.

²⁴ These transitions draw largely upon, but amend, those in Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith*, 77–79.

²⁵ A fascinating syndicated column in *The New York Times* makes the same case as Becker, albeit without reference to Becker’s work. See Ross Douthat, “The Case for Old Ideas,” *The New York Times Sunday Review*, March 8, 2015:11.

²⁶ The sacred stranger and deep traditions themes are distilled from Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith*, Part II, pp. 239–368.

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