

origins

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Divine Mercy Sunday Homily

Pope Francis

As the world slowly recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a risk it will be struck by an even worse virus, that of selfish indifference, Pope Francis said. This dangerous virus is “spread by the thought that life is better if it is better for me and that everything will be fine if it is fine for me,” he said in his homily at a Mass on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 19. “It begins there and ends up selecting one person over another, discarding the poor and sacrificing those left behind on the altar of progress.” The current pandemic instead must compel people to prepare for a “collective future” that sees the whole human family as one and holds all of the earth’s gifts in common in order to be shared justly with those in need, he said. “This is not some ideology: It is Christianity,”

“Let us show mercy to those who are most vulnerable; for only in this way will we build a new world.”

and it mirrors the way the early Christian community lived, the pope said at the Mass, celebrated privately at Rome’s Church of the Holy Spirit, which houses a shrine dedicated to Divine Mercy. The Mass was celebrated on the 20th anniversary of St. John Paul II’s declaration that the Sunday after Easter would be celebrated as Divine Mercy Sunday. Pope Francis spoke in Italian; a Vatican translation of his homily follows, copyright © 2020 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Last Sunday we celebrated the Lord’s resurrection; today we witness the resurrection of his disciple. It has already been a week, a week since the disciples had seen the risen Lord, but in spite of this they remained fearful, cringing behind “closed doors” (Jn 20:26), unable even to convince Thomas, the only one absent, of the resurrection.

What does Jesus do in the face of this timorous lack of belief? He returns and, standing in the same place, “in the midst” of the disciples, he repeats his greeting, “Peace be with you!” (Jn 20:19, 26). He starts all over.

The resurrection of his disciple begins here, from this *faithful and patient* mercy, from the discovery that God never tires of reaching out to lift us up when we fall. He wants us to see him not as a taskmaster with whom we have to settle accounts but as our Father who always raises us up. In life we go forward tentatively, uncertainly, like a toddler who takes a few steps and falls, a few steps more and falls again; yet each

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Humanity has failed to take care of the earth and its inhabitants, sinning against God and his gift of creation, Pope Francis said.

Celebrating Earth Day, which fell during the "Easter season of renewal, let us pledge to love and esteem the beautiful gift of the earth, our common home, and to care for all members of our human family," he said during his livestreamed weekly general audience from the Vatican.

The pope dedicated his catechesis April 22 to a reflection on the human and Christian responsibility to care for the earth, humanity's common home. The day marked the 50th Earth Day, which was established in 1970 to raise public awareness and concern for the environment and its impact on people's health and all life. This year also marks the fifth anniversary of the pope's encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home."

In his catechesis, the pope said Earth Day was "an occasion for renewing our commitment to love and care for our common home and for the weaker members of our human family."

"As the tragic coronavirus pandemic has taught us, we can overcome global challenges only by showing solidarity with one another and embracing the most vulnerable in our midst," he said.

As the Book of Genesis relates, he said, "we live in this common home as one human family in biodiversity with God's other creatures," and God has called on humanity to care for and respect his creation and "to offer love and compassion to our brothers and sisters, especially the most vulnerable among us, in imitation of God's love for us, manifested in his son Jesus."

God is good and always forgives, the pope said, however, "the earth never forgives: If we have despoiled the earth, the response will be very bad."

"Because of our selfishness,

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time his father puts him back on his feet. The hand that always puts us back on our feet is mercy: God knows that without mercy we will remain on the ground, that in order to keep walking, we need to be put back on our feet.

You may object, "But I keep falling!" The Lord knows this, and he is always ready to raise you up. He does not want us to keep thinking about our failings; rather, he wants us to look to him. For when we fall, he sees children needing to be put back on their feet; in our failings he sees children in need of his merciful love. Today, in this church that has become a shrine of mercy in Rome and on this Sunday that St. John Paul II dedicated to divine mercy 20 years ago, we confidently welcome this message.

Jesus said to St. Faustina, "I am love and mercy itself; there is no human misery that could measure up to my mercy" (*Diary*, Sept. 14, 1937). At one time the saint, with satisfaction, told Jesus that she had offered him all of her life and all that she had. But Jesus' answer stunned her, "You have not offered me the thing that is truly yours." What had that holy nun kept for herself? Jesus said to her with kindness, "My daughter, give me your failings" (Oct. 10, 1937).

We too can ask ourselves: "Have I given my failings to the Lord? Have I let him see me fall so that he can raise me up?" Or is there something I still keep inside me? A sin, a regret from the past, a wound that I have inside, a grudge against someone, an idea about a particular person. ... The Lord waits for us to offer him our failings so that he can help us experience his mercy.

Let us go back to the disciples. They had abandoned the Lord at his passion and felt guilty. But meeting them, Jesus did not give a long sermon. To them, who were wounded within, he shows his own wounds.

Thomas can now touch them and know of Jesus' love and how much Jesus had suffered for him, even though he had abandoned him. In those wounds, he touches with his hands God's tender closeness. Thomas arrived late, but once he received mercy he overtook the other disciples: He believed not only in the resurrection but in the boundless love of God. And he makes the most simple and beautiful profession

of faith, "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28).

Here is the resurrection of the disciple: It is accomplished when his frail and wounded humanity enters into that of Jesus. There, every doubt is resolved; there, God becomes *my God*; there, we begin to accept ourselves and to love life as it is.

Dear brothers and sisters, in the time of trial that we are presently undergoing, we too, like Thomas with our fears and our doubts, have experienced our frailty. We need the Lord, who sees beyond that frailty an irrepressible beauty. With him we rediscover how precious we are even in our vulnerability.

We discover that we are like beautiful crystals, fragile and at the same time precious. And if, like crystal, we are transparent before him, his light — the light of mercy — will shine in us and through us in the world. As the Letter of Peter said, this is a reason for being "filled with joy, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials" (1 Pt 1:6).

On this feast of Divine Mercy, the most beautiful message comes from Thomas, the disciple who arrived late; he was the only one missing. But the Lord waited for Thomas. Mercy does not abandon those who stay behind.

Now, while we are looking forward to a slow and arduous recovery from the pandemic, there is a danger that we will forget those who are left behind. The risk is that we may then be struck by an even worse virus, that of *selfish indifference*. A virus spread by the thought that life is better if it is better for me, and that everything will be fine if it is fine for me. It begins there and ends up selecting one person over another, discarding the poor and sacrificing those left behind on the altar of progress.

The present pandemic, however, reminds us that there are no differences or borders between those who suffer. We are all frail, all equal, all precious.

May we be profoundly shaken by what is happening all around us: The time has come to eliminate inequalities, to heal the injustice that is undermining the health of the entire human family! Let us learn from the early Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles. It received mercy and lived with

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mercy: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45). This is not some ideology: It is Christianity.

In that community, after the resurrection of Jesus, only one was left behind, and the others waited for him. Today the opposite seems to be the case: A small part of the human family has moved ahead, while the majority have remained behind.

Each of us could say, “These are complex problems; it is not my job to take care of the needy; others have to be concerned with it!” St. Faustina, after meeting Jesus, wrote: “In a soul that is suffering we should see Jesus on the cross, not a parasite and a burden. ... [Lord] you give us the chance to practice deeds of mercy, and we practice making judgments” (*Diary*, Sept. 6, 1937).

Yet she herself complained one day to Jesus that, in being merciful, one is thought to be naive. She said, “Lord, they often abuse my goodness.” And Jesus replied, “Never mind, don’t let it bother you; just be merciful to everyone always” (Dec. 24, 1937).

To everyone: Let us not think only of our interests, our vested interests. Let us welcome this time of trial as an opportunity to prepare for our collective future, a future for all without discarding anyone. Because without an all-embracing vision, there will be no future for anyone.

Today the simple and disarming love of Jesus revives the heart of his disciple. Like the apostle Thomas, let us accept mercy, the salvation of the world. And let us show mercy to those who are most vulnerable; for only in this way will we build a new world. ■

Care for Our Common Home: Jews, Christians and Muslims Confront Climate Change

Father Ryan, SJ

In the biannual McGinley lecture, Jesuit Father Patrick J. Ryan discussed how the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions are confronting climate. Father Ryan, the Laurence J. McGinley Professor of Religion and Society at Jesuit-run Fordham University in New York, was

scheduled to deliver the lecture March 31 at the school’s Manhattan campus and April 1 at the main campus in the Bronx, but the events were canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic. In his time holding the McGinley professorship — which was held for years by the late Cardinal Avery Dulles — Father Ryan has focused on dialogue among Christians, Jews and Muslims. In talking about the Jewish tradition, Father Ryan said that “the rabbinic mandate for ‘tik-kun olam’ — repairing this age or this world — engages Jews, wherever they live, to commit themselves to saving the space in which they live out their time, to confront the realities of climate change and work for the repair of the human environment.” In talking about the Christian tradition, Father Ryan noted that Pope Francis’ teaching on the environment in his encyclical letter “Laudato Si” is in the tradition of his predecessors, particularly St. John Paul II. Father Ryan said that “modern Muslims, more conscious than some of their ancestors of the realities of climate change, have come to take created nature less for granted.” Father Ryan’s lecture follows.

An undergraduate friend at the University of Ghana, where I used to teach four decades ago, defined himself as a scientific socialist — code name at that time for Marxist-Leninist. Scientific socialism, very anti-establishment, was all the rage in Ghanaian universities at that time. Scientific socialism has since been replaced, for better or worse, by born-again Christianity, proven by glossolalia. Of the two, if put to the choice, I prefer the first.

Despite our very different outlooks on life, my scientific socialist friend and I, while I was a guest in his family’s traditional homestead in northeastern Ghana, walked together one morning to a nearby earth shrine. Drought had ravaged the West African savannah for at least three years; the callous military government in Ghana at the time did nothing but lie about the extent of the problem in the northern third of the country. Profiteering on the misery of others, government agents had diverted to themselves food relief sent from abroad. The blind and the lepers were the worst off, abandoned in their isolated settlements, unable to fend for themselves. Drought, famine, misrule: The scientific socialist and I were obsessed with similar thoughts.

We walked through dusty fields toward an assemblage of angular rocks and a towering tree whose exposed roots extended like bony fingers across the hard, dry soil: an earth shrine. In the scant shade of the tree at midmorning sat two young men, sons of the earth shrine’s custodian, tired from weeding a nearby field. We

we have failed in our responsibility to be guardians and stewards of the earth,” the pope said. “We have polluted and despoiled it, endangering our very lives.”

The pope expressed his deep appreciation for the many international and local movements and initiatives that have been created in an effort to raise awareness and stir people’s consciences, and he said it will still be necessary “for our children to take to the streets to teach us the obvious: We have no future if we destroy the very environment that sustains us.”

“We have failed to care for the earth, our garden home; we have failed to care for our brothers and sisters. We have sinned against the earth, against our neighbors and ultimately against the Creator, the benevolent father who provides for everyone and desires us to live in communion and flourish together,” he said.

It is imperative that people restore “a harmonious relationship” with the earth and with the rest of humanity, he said.

It requires a new way of looking at the earth, not as a “storehouse of resources for us to exploit,” but as a sacred gift for sustaining all of humanity.

The pope said so many natural tragedies “are the earth’s response to our mistreatment.”

“If I ask the Lord now what he thinks, I don’t think he will tell me something very good,” the pope said. “We are the ones who have ruined the work of the Lord!”

“In today’s celebration of Earth Day, we are called to renew our sense of sacred respect for the earth, for it is not just our home but also God’s home. This should make us all the more aware that we stand on holy ground!” Pope Francis said.

Following is the Earth Day message of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the

spiritual leader of Orthodox Christians:

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, whose mission is to work with civil and faith communities for developing local solutions to global problems, including climate change, plastic pollution and threats to biodiversity. Earth Day promotes programs ranging from low-impact actions to "a billion acts of green" to address the paramount challenge of our time.

Of course, every day is earth day! Every day is an opportunity to celebrate "the earth as the Lord's and that all who dwell therein belong to the Lord" (Ps 24:1). Every day is a reminder of our vulnerability and solidarity. In fact, today, more than ever, we are also reminded of our responsibility to the earth and each other in light of that interdependence between the earth and all its inhabitants.

The ecological responsibility and the respect of the sacredness and the beauty of every human person, of the elderly and the disabled, the poor and the marginalized, the sick and the suffering, are today the universal categorical imperative for the whole humanity.

In recent weeks, with the alarming spread of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), we have been painfully reminded of the interconnection among human beings throughout the world. So we are obliged to reflect further on the exigency and urgency of our response to issues that are increasingly gathering momentum and threatening our survival.

While it may be strained to draw sweeping comparisons or simplistic connections between the human impact on the natural environment and a global crisis like COVID-19, can we not wonder whether the mandated human isolation to prevent the spread of the virus has resulted in clearer water and cleaner air and in a reevaluation of our relationship

talked with them in a desultory fashion about farming, about rain, about politics.

We were not the first, nor will we be the last, to bring such problems to an earth shrine. The earth is the mother of all humankind. Its shrines provide territorial centers for farmland throughout the West African Sahel, the southern "coast" (*sahil*) of the Sahara, as well as throughout the savannah, the undulating grasslands to the south of the Sahel.

The Sahel moves south annually into the savannah, and the savannah moves south annually into the forest zone that edges southward and westward toward the shores of the Atlantic. Threatened ecologically by logging and the lumber trade and, in some parts of West Africa, by oil drilling just offshore, the forest zone faces major ecological challenges as well.

West Africa is not alone in facing such challenges. Amazonia, the Congo Basin, the forests of Indonesia and Southeast Asia, the Arctic and Antarctic ice caps: Threats to their continued survival multiply. Right here in New York City and its suburbs, salt water from the Atlantic flooded lower Manhattan and the south shore of Brooklyn and Queens during Hurricane Sandy in late October 2012.

Climatologists can give you the environmental facts on global warming and rising sea levels. Presently, however, I wish to confine myself as a historian of religion to examining how the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions of faith — yesterday and today — have thought about the environment and the relevance of that thought to the problem of climate change.

Jews Confront Climate Change

One of the earliest verses in the Hebrew Bible strikes many modern people, and especially those concerned with ecology, as problematic. The words come from what many contemporary Scripture scholars call the priestly narrative of creation, the first chapter of Genesis. "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth'" (Gn 1:26).

In a world of diminishing natural resources — overfished waters, disappearing birds and bees, felled forests, exhausted farmland — *dominion* can sound threatening. The Hebrew root of the word translated as "have dominion" (*radah*) implies royal domination, even trampling.

Orthodox Jewish reading of the creation nar-

ratives, however, counterbalances the image of human domination with the second account of creation, what modern Scripture scholars call the Yahwist-Elohistic account: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Gn 2:15). Tilling (*abedah*) and keeping (*shamerah*) are gentler concepts, suggesting working the land and preserving it, much kinder images than dominion.

In *Bereshit rabbah*, moreover, the great aggadic meditation on the Book of Genesis composed by rabbis still living in the Holy Land between 300 and 500 C.E., the authors suggest that tilling and keeping may actually mean that the first human beings were to work (*till*) on six days and rest one day a week ("keep" the sabbath).¹

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth, writes about the meaning of the first creation account:

"Genesis 1 is best understood not as pseudoscience, still less as myth, but as jurisprudence; that is to say, as the foundation of the moral law. God created the world; therefore God owns the world. We are his guests — strangers and temporary residents, as the Bible puts it. God has the right to specify the conditions of our tenancy on Earth. The radical message of Genesis 1 is that divine sovereignty is constitutional. God rules not by might but by right, and so must we."²

The ecological themes in the creation narratives in Genesis are followed up in the Book of Exodus with the enumeration of commandments and especially the command that human beings take one day of rest a week, imitating God, who rested on the seventh day (Gn 2:2-3). Before that day of rest was connected with synagogue-going, and later with church-going, it was more concerned with self-care and also with labor-management relations:

"Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work — you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it" (Ex 20:8-11).

Even slaves, livestock and foreigners (the alien resident, probably immigrant employees) are to have a day of rest each week!

The weekly sabbath rest decreed for faithful Israelites extends to their farmland as well, with the proviso that the landless poor should have access to that fallow land during its sab-

bath rest. “For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard” (Ex 23:10-11).

The landless poor and wild animals are less likely to exhaust land left fallow than moguls of agribusiness, ancient or modern. The Book of Leviticus, an integral part of the Torah that may have been reduced to writing only in the Second Temple era, returns to the theme of land sabbath, attempting to answer some of the economic questions that may have arisen by the hearers of the Exodus teaching about the yearlong land sabbath every seventh year. “You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath — you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food” (Lv 25:6-7). Animals, whether domesticated or wild, also have the right to eat of produce of that resting land.

The practical mind immediately queries whether so many can be fed from the spontaneous yield of land left fallow for a year. God responds confidently to the economic questions we may raise: “I will order my blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it will yield a crop for three years” (Lv 25:21). For the Book of Leviticus, the land belongs not to the people of Israel but to God, quite literally a land Lord. “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land” (Lv 25:23-24).

Note that Leviticus specifies that all humankind, including the people of Israel, “are but aliens and tenants.” Psalm 24 puts it succinctly: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.”

Sabbath — a time of stopping, resting, imitating God’s rest on the seventh day after creating the universe — provides us with a key concept for understanding the Jewish approach to ecological concerns. In his essay, “The Sabbath,” Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-72), a professor for many years at Jewish Theological Seminary here in New York City, asserts that the Jewish tradition, unlike polytheistic forms of faith, privileges time over space. Space is understood as a subset of time, especially in the first creation account in Genesis. Heschel continues:

“Time is the process of creation, and things

of space are results of creation. When looking at space we see the products of creation; when intuiting time we hear the process of creation. Things of space exhibit a deceptive independence. They show off a veneer of limited permanence. Things created conceal the Creator. It is the dimension of time wherein man meets God, wherein man becomes aware that every instant is an act of creation, a Beginning, opening up new roads for ultimate realizations. Time is the presence of God in the world of space, and it is within time that we are able to sense the unity of all beings.”³

The sabbath of the land most dramatically demonstrates how time takes priority over space in the tradition of Israel. The multiple experiences Israel had of diaspora (Assyrian, Babylonian, Roman-Byzantine) also detached the faith of Israelites from the land of Israel, giving birth to Judaism as a worldwide faith. Jews learned in each experience of diaspora how important but impermanent was their relationship to the land and even their relationship to the sacred space that was the temple.

Jews only returned to the Promised Land, at least in large numbers, a little more than a century ago, with the rise of Zionism. There is a small minority of religious Zionists today, inside and outside the state of Israel, who would like to see the Jerusalem temple rebuilt and its sacrificial *cultus* restored. Modern Israeli law, however, forbids Jews to hold religious services on the Temple Mount, reserving that space for Muslims.⁴

More concerned with time than with space, the Jewish tradition of faith encourages care for the land within Israel as a temporal concern. Without farmland and urban settlements, the present and future project of Zionism, whether secular or religious, withers. Today many devout Jews throughout the world dedicate themselves to moral ecological concerns not only in the state of Israel but also in other countries where large numbers of Jews reside. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, referring to the work of the 19th-century German Orthodox rabbi Samuel Raphael Hirsch (1808-88), expresses this most eloquently:

“The Midrash says that God showed Adam around the Garden of Eden and said, ‘Look at my works! See how beautiful they are — how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy my world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.’ Creation has its own dignity as God’s masterpiece, and though we have the mandate to use it, we have none to destroy or despoil it. Rabbi Hirsch says that Shabbat was given to humanity ‘in order that he should not grow overbearing in his dominion’ of God’s creation. On the

with nature and its ability to heal us?

We hasten to add, of course, that no loss of human life can ever justify any ecological renewal of the planet, but there is no doubt that individual action and community response are vital in encountering climate change and the coronavirus pandemic. And we fervently pray for the quick return of normalcy in these surreal times.

Crisis is a moment of clear and definitive judgment. And the COVID-19 crisis is a compelling moment of truth and assessment of our respect and regard for the precious gifts that we have received and been entrusted with by God. Over the past decades, we have underlined and declared that when we are isolated from God, then we, inevitably, if not inadvertently, also exploit the planet’s resources.

Indeed, we have repeatedly associated and even identified such behavior against God’s creation with sin. Like us, the earth, too, is suffering from “isolation” and alienation. “The whole of creation is groaning with labor pains to this day ... eagerly longing for ... its liberation by the children of God” (Rom 8:19–22). This time of uncertainty and insecurity has taught us to care for one another. Will we also learn, at last, to mitigate our impact on the environment?

As a result of the ecological disruption created by the global crisis of this coronavirus pandemic, Earth Day will be celebrated electronically this year throughout the world. How paradoxical that the earth continues to inspire, instruct and invite us toward a renewed commitment and restored covenant with creation.

How will we respond? Our prayer is that this critical moment will be for all of us and for the entire planet an occasion for renewal and redemption, for liberation and transformation, as well as for inspiration and illumination.

day of rest, 'he must, as it were, return the borrowed world to its Divine Owner in order to realize that it is but lent to him.'

"Ingrained in the process of creation and central to the life of every Jew is a weekly reminder that our dominion of earth must be *l'shem shamayim* — in the name of heaven. The choice is ours. If we continue to live as though God had only commanded us to subdue the earth, we must be prepared for our children to inherit a seriously degraded planet, with the future of human civilization at risk. If we see our role as masters of the earth as a unique opportunity to truly serve and care for the planet, its creatures and its resources, then we can reclaim our status as stewards of the world and raise our new generations in an environment much closer to that of Eden."

The rabbinic mandate for *tikkun olam* — repairing this age or this world — engages Jews, wherever they live, to commit themselves to saving the space in which they live out their time, to confront the realities of climate change and work for the repair of the human environment.

Christians Confront Climate Change

Both the Hebrew Bible (TaNaKH) and the Greek Old Testament make it easier for those of us who are Christians to think about creation. We Christians inherit from Israel its canonical scriptures and, especially in modern times, learn more and more from its extraordinarily varied traditions of commentary on the Torah, the prophets and the writings.

The Greek Old Testament, as it is received in the Catholic tradition,⁵ contains a book that seems not to be a translation of a document originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic, the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon.⁶ Probably composed by an Alexandrian Jew of the late first century B.C.E. or the early first century C.E., the Book of Wisdom ascribes words of the greatest elegance to Solomon, David's son, now the very model of a good student. Solomon prays "to know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements; the beginning and end and middle of times, the alternations of the solstices and the changes of the seasons, the cycles of the year and the constellations of the stars, the natures of animals and the tempers of wild animals, the powers of spirits and the thoughts of human beings, the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots" (Wis 7:17b-20).

Before and especially after the reign of Constantine, when Christianity became a *religio licita* throughout the Roman Empire, Christians felt free to take up and even advance Greek traditions of learning, not unlike Solomon in the Book of Wisdom. Philosophical and theological scholarship in the largest sense continued throughout the first millennium C.E. and into the second, not only in the Greek and Latin churches and empires but also in Syriac and Coptic Christian communities, before and after the rise of Islam. In the West, where Latin remained the language of education until the Reformation era, the mendicant friars — and especially Dominicans and Franciscans — advanced such studies from the 13th century on, influencing the intellectual foundation and growth of universities like Oxford, Cambridge and Paris.

Two medieval Catholic friars whose lives overlapped by one year, Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), took different and yet complementary attitudes toward created nature in all its variety, one more ecstatic and poetic and the other more contemplative and scientific. In the "Canticle of the Creatures" Francis sings about the variety of personified creatures joining humankind in praising God:

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who is the day and through whom you give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of you, Most High.
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather through whom you give sustenance to your creatures.
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.⁷

Thomas Aquinas, both a theologian and a philosopher, studied not only biblical sources but also the works of Aristotle available to him, commenting, for instance, on the eight books of the *Physics* of Aristotle. Dry and clear as Thomas always is, he could wax poetic when writing about divinely created nature:

"[N]ature is nothing but a certain kind of art, i.e., the divine art, impressed upon things, by which these things are moved to a determinate end. It is as if the ship-builder were able to give to timbers that by which they would move themselves to take the form of a ship."⁸

In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas notes that "the preservation of things by God is a continuation of that action whereby [God] gives existence. That [creative] action [of God] is without either motion or time; so also the preservation of light in the air is by the continual influence of the sun."⁹ The Angelic Doctor had much more in common with *il Poverello* than might appear on the surface.

Ignatius Loyola in the 16th century, not famous for his elegant prose, ends his *Spiritual Exercises* with what he called a "contemplation for attaining love," a paean to God's beauty in the realm of creation and the realm of grace.

People completing the exercises are urged to see everything as a gift from God, God wishing to give the ultimate gift of the divine selfhood to human beings. They are to contemplate how God "dwells in creatures — in the elements, giving being, in the plants, causing growth, in the animals, producing sensation, and in humankind, granting the gift of understanding," as well as to consider how God "works and labors on my behalf in all created things." Finally, they are "to see how all that is good and every gift of understanding descends from on high; so, my limited power descends from the supreme and infinite power above, and similarly justice, goodness, pity, mercy, etc., as rays from the sun, and waters from a fountain."¹⁰

Filled with this type of Ignatian vision, the 19th-century English Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins, sees God's beauty, God's grandeur reflected in created things:

The world is charged with the grandeur
of God.
It will flame out, like shining from
shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze

of oil
 Crushed. Why do men then now not
 reckon his rod?
 Generations have trod, have trod,
 have trod;
 And all is seared with trade; bleared,
 smeared with toil;
 And wears man's smudge and shares
 man's smell: the soil
 Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
 There lives the dearest freshness deep
 down things;
 And though the last lights off the black
 West went
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink
 eastward, springs—
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
 World broods with warm breast and
 with ah! bright wings.

It is tempting for me as a Jesuit, and at least a partial inheritor of the philosophical, theological and humanistic traditions of the high Middle Ages and the Renaissance, to trace a direct line from Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, Ignatius Loyola and Gerard Manley Hopkins to Papa Bergoglio, as the Italian press always calls him — Pope Francis. I give in to that temptation with alacrity.

As early as 2007, while still archbishop of Buenos Aires, Bergoglio had spoken to educators in the Argentine Catholic school system, reminding them of the need to inculcate in their students ecological ethics, an important theme Pope Francis developed at much greater length in his encyclical letter of 2015, *Laudato Si'*.

Climate change deniers and many neoconservatives in Europe and the United States have proven particularly belligerent in their reading of that encyclical.¹¹ In their criticisms they neglect to notice how continuous the teaching of Francis is with that of his immediate predecessors, and especially Pope John Paul II. I cite but one example from *Laudato Si'*, a passage ending with a quotation from Pope John Paul II's 1991 social encyclical *Centesimus Annus*:

"Neglecting to monitor the harm done to nature and the environmental impact of our decisions is only the most striking sign of a disregard for the message contained in the structures of nature itself. When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabili-

ties — to offer just a few examples — it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected. Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble, for 'instead of carrying out his role as a cooperater with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature.'"¹²

Four years later, in October 2019, a special assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region took place in Rome during three weeks of October 2019. Like the 1980 Synod of Bishops convoked in Rome by Pope John Paul II for the church in the Netherlands, and another for the churches of Lebanon in union with Rome in 1995, the synod on Amazonia was locally focused. Of its participants, most came from the area under discussion, the nine countries that geographically contribute to the Amazon River Basin (Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana).

Other representatives of the universal church were also involved, as well as Roman Curia prelates charged with related issues, especially two friends of mine, Cardinal Peter Turkson from Ghana, and Cardinal Michael Czerny, a Czech-born Jesuit from Canada, who has had extensive pastoral experience in Africa and Latin America.

In his postsynodal apostolic exhortation, issued on Feb. 2, 2020, Pope Francis returned to many of the themes of that synod, summed up in what he called four dreams for Amazonia: a social dream, a cultural dream, an ecological dream and an ecclesial dream. Words from the third chapter on his ecological dream speak to the realities of that area and similar geographical zones:

"The equilibrium of our planet also depends on the health of the Amazon region. Together with the biome of the Congo and Borneo, it contains a dazzling diversity of woodlands on which rain cycles, climate balance and a great variety of living beings also depend. It serves as a great filter of carbon dioxide, which helps avoid the warming of the earth. ...

"When the forest is eliminated, it is not replaced, because all that is left is a terrain with few nutrients that then turns into a dry land or one poor in vegetation.

This is quite serious, since the interior of the Amazonian forest contains countless resources that could prove essential for curing diseases. Its fish, fruit and other abundant gifts provide rich nutrition for humanity.

"Furthermore, in an ecosystem like that of the Amazon region, each part is essential for the preservation of the whole. The lowlands and marine vegetation also need to be fertilized by the alluvium of the Amazon. The cry of the Amazon region reaches everyone because 'the conquest and exploitation of resources ... has today reached the point of threatening the environment's hospitable aspect: the environment as "resource" risks threatening the environment as "home."' The interest of a few powerful industries should not be considered more important than the good of the Amazon region and of humanity as a whole."¹³

The concern of Pope Francis for Amazonia reminds me of yet another poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, in which Hopkins evokes the beauty of a much smaller river than the Amazon, a Scottish stream and waterfall from which the poem takes its title, "Inversnaid." Let me quote only the final and most relevant quatrain:

What would the world be, once bereft
 Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,
 O let them be left, wildness and wet;
 Long live the weeds and the
 wilderness yet.

Muslims Confront Climate Change

Muslims are summoned to worship five times a day with words chanted in Arabic (the *adhan*) that echo from minarets throughout the world, wherever Muslims live and respond to those words. They begin with the repeated call and response, *Allahu akbar!* — best translated as "God is supreme!" The two central proclamations of Muslim witness follow: "I testify: no god, only GOD! I testify: Muhammad GOD's messenger!"

Those two central proclamations are followed by corresponding commands, "Attend to worship! Attend to flourishing!" The supremacy of God is once again proclaimed, ending with the coda, "No god, only GOD!"

There are slight variations in the call to worship according to sectarian belonging and time of day, but the basic elements are always the same throughout

the Muslim world.

The Islamic call to worship summons Muslims not only to precisely prescribed ritual worship (*salat*), but also to what is called *falah*, which I have translated as “flourishing.”¹⁴ The latter Arabic word is curious. Literally, it means tillage, the act of cultivating the soil for farming.¹⁵ For the Arabs of seventh-century Arabia, such *falah*, or tillage, was not a characteristic occupation except in the oases of the Arabian Peninsula.

More typical of the economy and culture of the bedouin Arabs in antiquity was *razzia* (*ghazu*), mutual raiding between nomadic clans for the exchange of goods and even persons. More typical of the urbanized Arabs of trading towns like Mecca was commerce (*tijarah*), not always governed by ethical considerations in what Muslims call the pre-Islamic era of ignorance (*jahiliyyah*).

Some of the commerce of Mecca Muhammad knew in his preprophetic years he found highly reprehensible, tainted by sharp dealing and corrupted by its connection with polytheistic festivals he had come to repudiate as one who had become a monotheist even before he received divine revelation.

The summons to *falah*, parallel to the summons to ritual worship, epitomizes something central to Islam. As modern Muslims constantly remind us, Islam is more than a ritual or devotional life. Islam, modern Muslims rightly insist, is a “whole way of life” — a whole civilization or normative culture. (The same is true, however, for every faith tradition, to a greater or lesser degree, although not every faith tradition is as equally concerned as is the Islamic tradition with the minutiae of daily life.)

The Muslim's ritual life follows precise rules and regulations; so does his or her hygiene, diet, mode of dress, education, economics and politics. Not every modern Muslim has submitted all aspects of life to Islamic regulation nor does every modern Muslim agree with the rigorist interpretations of such regulation insisted on by certain contemporary interpreters of Islam, especially the neo-Hanbalites (“Wahhabis”) who have religiously dominated what is now Saudi Arabia since the 18th century.

The summons to *falah* challenges all Muslims to distinguish themselves from non-Muslims by the concrete, daily practices of life. It summoned them in sev-

enth-century Arabia away from nomadic raiding of merchant caravans and the rough-and-tumble commerce in trading centers like Mecca. It summoned them to the orderly oasis life symbolized by tillage — sowing, weeding and reaping.

Medina was the first such ideal oasis, made so by Muhammad's arrival there with the first Meccan Muslim emigrants in 622 C.E. Every society that attempts to be Muslim tries to imitate, in some sense, Medina ruled by the Prophet. Every Muslim society that repudiates the submission to God that is the essence of Islamic morality chooses to live in the era of ignorance.

Falah eventually comes to signify every aspect of life that Islam regulates, insisting that such regulation takes its origin from God's self-disclosure in revelation to people of faith. Although the word *falah* does not appear as such in the Quran, verbs or participles from the same root (F-L-H) do appear 40 times. They describe the reward in this world as well as in the world to come of those who flourish by doing good deeds, summoned day by day by God and his messenger to a way of life lived out in the presence of their Creator. The Islamic tradition of faith summons men and women to what the first surah of the Quran calls “the path of those whom You have graced, not the path of those who merit Your wrath, not the path of those who lose their way” (Quran 1:6-7).

The late Bishop Kenneth Cragg, a deeply sympathetic Christian scholar of Islam, sums up under the call to *falah* what Cragg describes as “the Islamic order for human society.”¹⁶ Thus the second summons of the call to worship bids the faithful to submit to God in very concrete circumstances, day by day, renouncing the unbridled mercantilism of pre-Islamic urban markets like Mecca or the wildness of Bedouin survival of the fittest. Thus the *‘ibadat* (services of worship), usually called the pillars of Islam, are complemented by what have been called *mu‘amalat*, human transactions in the broadest sense. A fully Muslim life — total submission of oneself to God — involves not only ritual practice but also moral conduct in day-to-day affairs.

Islamic submission to God begins not with Muhammad in the seventh century C.E. but with the first response of creation to the divine command, “‘Be!’ and it is” (Quran 2:117; 3:47; 6:73, 16:40; 19:35;

36:82; 40:68).¹⁷ Nevertheless, in historical, this-worldly terms, the faith tradition of Islam traces its origins to Arabia and to the ecstatic experience of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah, a Meccan of the late sixth and early seventh century C.E. Arabia — once verdant, as the fossil fuel wealth of some of the modern peninsular states attests — had become *Arabia deserta* as *Arabia felix* shrank in the centuries before the lifetime of the Prophet (570-632 C.E.).¹⁸ The Quran came to Muhammad as divine revelation at a time when once arable Arabia had become, for the most part, a wasteland crossed by trading caravan routes and dotted with a few oases where the life of quite literal tillage could be lived.

The Quran gives some clues as to how God revealed, and God's Prophet experienced, the world of nature. The wonders (*ayat*) of nature, and especially camels, so important in a desert environment, bear witness to their Creator: “Won't they look at the camels, how they were created? And the sky, how it is raised up? And the mountains, how they are exalted? And the land, how it is spread out?” (Quran 88:17-20).

Adam, higher than animals but lower than angels, is placed on earth as God's deputy, despite the objections of angels, and especially the objections of Iblis, the enemy of human nature. “When your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am about to appoint a deputy on earth,’ they responded: ‘Will You appoint someone who will do evil [on earth] and shed blood, while we [angels] praise You and hallow You?’ [God] said, ‘I know what you do not know’” (Quran 2:30).

The privileged knowledge communicated by God to Adam is also, in some analogous sense, communicated to creatures less exalted than Adam. God even inspires (*awhà*) nonhuman creation, as the surah of the bee suggests. “Your Lord inspired the bee, saying ‘You should choose [to build] hives in the mountains and in the trees and the thatched [roofs] that people construct. Then eat of every fruit and follow the paths your Lord opens up to you.’ From [bees'] innards comes a nectar of varying colors that provides healing for people. Therein is a sign for people who reflect” (Quran 16:68-69).

Modern Muslims, more conscious than some of their ancestors of the realities of climate change, have come to take created nature less for granted.

The extraordinary petroleum wealth of some of the Gulf States, based as it is on a finite underground supply of fossil fuel, reminds conscientious Muslims of an ancient saying attributed to Muhammad: “Muslims share in three [things] — grass [pasture], water and fire.”¹⁹ Water and grassy pastureland are more and more in short supply in many countries of the Middle East, and desalinization plants to convert salt water into fresh water are only affordable for plutocracies. Oil refineries set on fire in the internecine struggles of the contemporary Arabian Peninsula and its nearest neighbors should remind us that grass and fire need water if these wealthy Gulf States are going to survive.

A contemporary Iranian-born polymath, Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr, famous for his work in the history and philosophy of science in an Islamic context, has written some of the most cogent reflections on the environmental crisis in the central Muslim world. He is particularly critical of the petroleum-based economies in Muslim countries that promote conservative interpretations of the Islamic religious tradition and yet concurrently subscribe to the most utilitarian “scientism” in their exploitation of natural resources. “Whether there is a modernist or a so-called fundamentalist government ruling over a Muslim society, there is a blind acceptance of modern Western science, and Western technology is adopted as rapidly as possible, with little interest in the environmental consequences of such actions.”²⁰

Professor Nasr has more readers outside the central Muslim world than he does within it. We can only hope that his words will be heard not only in his native Iran, but also in the other competitor petroleum-producing states of the Gulf.

By a curious irony, Pope Francis, toward the end of his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, quotes a 16th-century Muslim mystic of Cairo, 'Ali al-Khawwas (d. 1532 or 1542). An illiterate who earned his living as a palm-leaf plaister, 'Ali al-Khawwas was greatly influenced by another Egyptian mystic, the better known 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani (d. 1565).²¹ The wisdom of 'Ali al-Khawwas, as quoted by Pope Francis, speaks to all who grasp the omnipresence of God in the world around us.

“There is a subtle mystery in each of the movements and sounds of this world. The [mystical] initiate will capture what is being said when the wind blows, the trees

sway, water flows, flies buzz, doors creak, birds sing, or in the sound of strings or flutes, the sighs of the sick, the groans of the afflicted.”²²

Conclusion

I want to return with you imaginatively to the earth shrine I visited with my undergraduate friend 40 years ago. Not too far south of that earth shrine, climate change has become more and more noticeable in recent years; deforestation is the main cause. Loggers have relentlessly harvested rosewood trees (botanically classified as *Pterocarpus erinaceus*), especially in the forests of the newly created savannah region of Ghana. They have exported rosewood logs illegally to China, where local furniture entrepreneurs use the rosewood to manufacture neoantique furniture.

European and American consumers vie for such neoantique furniture, paying enormous prices to make their high-rise apartments and suburban split-levels look like the banqueting halls and state-rooms of the Medici. Since 2012, however, most of the rosewood has become furniture for China's *nouveaux riches*. “Between January 2015 and June 2019 Ghana exported \$300 million (542,085 tons) of *hongmu* [the Chinese words for rosewood] to China despite repeat bans on harvesting, transport and export.”²³

The Ming dynasty has returned to the Middle Kingdom; Maoism is not what it used to be. Both under the present political administration in Ghana as well as under preceding administrations, this illegal trade in rosewood has continued.

Ghana's environmental challenge with climate change pales before the results over the past year of climate change in Australia and California. Bill McKibben, Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Vermont's Middlebury College, and the founder of the environmentalist group 350.org, has campaigned in the United States on the subject of climate change for many years. He opposed the construction of the Canadian-American XL pipeline project and spent three days in a Washington, D.C., jail in 2012 for his activism in that cause.

McKibben is impartial in his criticism of American politicians. No friend of President Trump's environmental policies, McKibben quotes in a recent article in *The New York Review of Books* a 2018 speech in which former President

Obama boasted at Rice University, not insignificantly located in oil-rich Texas, “You wouldn't always know it, but [oil production] went up every year I was president.”²⁴

McKibben notes in the same article that the onetime libertarian and climate change skeptic Ronald Bailey has recently announced a conversion of heart and mind on this topic. In 1992 Bailey, during the first United Nations Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, deplored the fact that the United States was “officially buying into the notion that “global warming” is a serious environmental problem.” In January 2020, however, Bailey officially admitted that he had been wrong. “I have unhappily concluded, based on the balance of the evidence, that climate change is proceeding faster and is worse than I had earlier judged it to be. ... Most of the evidence points toward a significantly warmer world by the end of the century.”²⁵

McKibben calls Bailey's recent admission a *mea culpa*, a liturgical phrase from the Latin Mass of the Roman rite. Thrice repeated during the opening penitential rite of the eucharistic liturgy, the priest and people strike their breasts and say, in English, “Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.”

Maybe we all must say that to God in the face of climate change as we head further into the 21st century. Repentance, however, entails a firm purpose of amendment. The time is now.

Notes

- ¹ See *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 3rd ed., trans. and ed. H. Freedman (London/New York: The Soncino Press, 1983), 1:130.
- ² See www.rabbitsacks.org/genesis-tells-us-duty-protect-planet/Sacks.
- ³ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's and The Sabbath* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 100.
- ⁴ For a recent example reported in *The Times of Israel* of the Israeli government enforcing that law in December 2019, see “3 Jewish Israelis indicted for praying on the Temple Mount,” available online at www.timesofisrael.com/3-jewish-israelis-indicted-for-praying-on-temple-mount.
- ⁵ For Catholics, the deuterocanonical works (called Apocrypha by Protestants) include Judith, Tobit, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Baruch, the two Books of Maccabees and the Greek additions to Daniel and Esther.
- ⁶ It also seems probable that the Second Book of Maccabees, a series of supplements to the First Book of Maccabees, was composed originally in Greek by a Jewish author.
- ⁷ This is the translation of the hymn of St. Francis in the English translation of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, 87, available at www.vatican.va.
- ⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Eight Books of the Physics of Aristotle*, Book II, Lesson 14, available online at www.isidore.com/aquinas/Physics.html.
- ⁹ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 104, art. 1 ad 4.
- ¹⁰ From “The Spiritual Exercises,” in St. Ignatius of Loyola,

Personal Writings, trans. and ed. Joseph Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 329-30.

- 11 The most vituperative of these critics in the United States is an artist named Maureen Mullarkey, once a regular contributor to the conservative monthly *First Things*, whom the present editor, R.R. Reno — no flaming liberal, himself — decided to eliminate from their regular roster. Her high dudgeon on the subject of the pan-Amazon synod makes for entertaining if incendiary reading. See “Vatican’s Amazon Synod Document Glorifies Tribal Culture and Condemns the West,” <http://thefederalist.com/2019/12/11>.
- 12 *Laudato Si’*, 117. The quotation that concludes that paragraph derives from the encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991), 37.
- 13 See *Querida Amazonia*, 48, available at www.vatican.va. Within this paragraph Pope Francis quotes from Pope John Paul II, Address to an International Convention on “The Environment and Health,” (March 24, 1997), 2.
- 14 In so translating *falah*, I am following the example of Michael Sells, *Approaching the Quran: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, Ore.: White Cloud Press, 1999), 150.
- 15 In Morocco, the Ministry of Agriculture is called the *Wizarat al-Filahah*, literally the ministry concerned with tillage. An Egyptian peasant farmer is called a *fallah*. A word derived from that root has entered into English, more frequently in the plural than in the singular: *fellaheen*, a term used for the peasants of Egypt.
- 16 See *The Call of the Minaret* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956, rpt. 1964), 140.
- 17 On this theme, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957, rpt. 1977), 10.
- 18 See Tim Mackintosh-Smith, *Arabs: A 3,000 Year History of Peoples, Tribes and Empires* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), 23-24.
- 19 Sunan Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-ijarah*, Book 23, Number 3470, available in English at www.qurango.com/dawud/023.sat.html.
- 20 “Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World and the Environmental Crisis,” in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, ed. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press for the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, 2003), 99-100.
- 21 See M. Winter, “al-Sha’rani,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition*, ed. P.J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1960-2009), 9:316. The highly literate al-Sha’rani called himself *ummi* (untrained, unlettered) in comparison with his illiterate spiritual teacher, ‘Ali al-Khawwas, whom he characterized as an *‘alim*, a religious scholar. See J. Spencer Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 220-25, especially 221. The tomb shrine of ‘Ali al-Khawwas is revered in Cairo to the present day.
- 22 See Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, ed. *Anthologie du soufisme* (Paris, 1978), 200. This is the citation for the quotation from ‘Ali al-Khawwas given in Endnote 159 of the encyclical.
- 23 Environmental Investigation Agency, “Ban-Boozled: How Corruption and Collusion Fuel Illegal Rosewood Trade in Ghana,” available at www.eia-global.org. I am grateful to another former student at the University of Ghana, who later did an M.B.A. at Fordham, Samuel Shaibu Adam, for directing my attention to this report.
- 24 Bill McKibben, “A Very Hot Year,” *The New York Review of Books* 67, No. 4 (March 12, 2020), 14. Henceforth cited as McKibben.
- 25 McKibben, 13, quoting from Bailey’s article, “Climate Change: How Lucky Do You Feel?” which appeared in the journal *Reason* (January 2020). ■

Judaism and the Environment

Claudia Setzer

In a response to the biannual McGinley lecture by Jesuit Father Patrick J. Ryan, Claudia Setzer discussed Jewish views on climate change. In his time holding the Laurence J. McGinley Professor of Religion and Society at Jesuit-run Fordham University in New York, Father Ryan has focused on dialogue among Christians, Jews and Muslims, and his lectures have included responses from Jewish and Muslim perspectives. The McGinley lecture and responses on climate were due to be given March 31 at Fordham’s Manhattan campus and April 1 at the main campus in the Bronx, but were canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic. In talking about approaches to climate change in the Jewish tradition, Setzer, a professor of religious studies at Manhattan College in New York, said that “the whole idea of humanity as the ‘crown of creation’ gives a false impression of humanity’s separation and dominion over nature.” Setzer’s response follows.

It is no surprise that Jewish sources overflow with celebration of nature. We have a God without body and without humanity, abstract despite all the titles we heap on God. How then can we hope to know God? The tradition has answered with two directives: Look at Scripture and look at creation. God’s signature is in nature and all that it contains, including humanity.

When I think about Jews, Judaism and environmental ethics, I see more good news than bad, but I do not romanticize the problem. When in 1967 Lynn White Jr. wrote “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,”¹ an oft-cited article that implicated the Hebrew Bible, Christianity and its modes of thinking as key to Western attitudes toward the environment, Jews and others reacted by searching the tradition to prove him wrong.

Yet he had a point. The whole idea of humanity as the “crown of creation” gives a false impression of humanity’s separation and dominion over nature. Sabbath, the day of Sabbath rest, for example, has

two sides. It is a day to refrain from using a car, from cooking, from mowing the lawn, or worse, from using a leaf blower.

We are meant to reflect on being part of creation, rather than acting on it, so it should lighten the environmental footprint. Yet Sabbath observance might involve keeping an oven on for 25 hours, keeping on an electric water heater for tea and coffee or leaving lights on. In my apartment building we have lights on in the hallways 24/7, in part for the Sabbath observers who do not want to turn on lights even by their body movement. Passover involves a considerable amount of throwing out of food, even if we try to use up or donate what we can. So Sabbath and holiday observance, like almost any human celebration, comes with an environmental price tag. Do we behave as if we are the crown of creation or grateful members of the choir of creation?

Jewish activists have come forward to construct a new/old ethic of Jewish environmentalism. The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life is one of several Jewish environmental organizations. Any group concerned with social justice and *tikkun olam*, repair of the world, must confront the challenge of climate change and environmental degradation. One of the guiding lights of the movement and part of COEJL was the late Rabbi Lawrence Troster, whom I remember well as an upbeat young rabbinical student with long hair.² One obituary headline for him read “ecotheologian returns to the earth.” I hope he would approve of that.

In good rabbinic fashion, the ecotheologians in the Jewish community have drawn on ancient sources for guidance. The sources are plentiful. One of the earliest biblical images is of God as the first planter, “And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man (Adam) whom he had formed” (Gn 2:8). The covenant with Abraham includes a certain land (Gn 12:1), implying a spatial element to the promise.³

Many psalms extol the natural world as God’s locus of power and creativity, “You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches” (Ps 104:10-12).

Even the laws require humans be good stewards — the law of *shmittah*, or the sabbatical year, allowing the land to rest every seven years (Lv 25:2-7), or the law against wanton destruction of fruit trees in an act of war (Dt 20:19-20). This verse expands the principle of *Bal Tashchit*, “do not destroy,” to any kind of wastefulness. I was slightly startled to see it at, of all places, the snack bar of the Museum of the Bible, encouraging us to limit our trash.

Rabbinic stories about tree planting abound. “How can a person of flesh and blood follow God? ... God, from the very beginning of creation, was occupied before all else with planting, as it is written, ‘And first of all, the Eternal God planted a garden in Eden.’ Therefore occupy yourself first and foremost with planting” (Leviticus Rabbah 25:3). The reminder of the world as Eden continues in the midrash, also quoted by Father Ryan:

“Look at God’s work — for who can straighten what he has twisted? When the Blessed Holy One created the first human, he took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him: ‘Look at my works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! And all that I have created, it was for you that I created it. Pay attention that you do not corrupt and destroy my world: if you corrupt it, there is no one to repair it after you’” (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13).

Liturgy includes the choir of creation image, for example the use of the last psalm in morning prayer, *Kol Ha Neshamah Tehalel Yah*, “Let everything that breathes praise the Lord.”⁴ Medieval Hebrew poets from Spain like Dunash ben Labrat joined with Muslim poets in celebrating the natural world through lush images of the garden. Even medieval sumptuary laws, which prescribed limiting fancy dress or lavish celebrations, seemed to curb overconsumption.

While we may draw lessons from Judaism and construct meaning in light of our own experience, I doubt the voices in the classical sources could begin to fathom the situation we now face. A frequently cited axiom from Ecclesiastes 1:4 is “*Dor holech v’dor ba. Raq HaOlam omedet*, A generation goes and a generation comes. Only the earth remains.”

It meant God might wreak havoc on a grand scale or reward Israel via natural events, but the possibility of restoration

was always there. No more floods would cover the world, a people might one day return to Eden or enter a new, Promised Land. The idea that the world itself would not continue or that it would be dismantled by humans was unthinkable. In some ways, the apocalyptic voices of Judaism seem more appropriate to our times, especially as I write this in self-isolation, waiting out the COVID-19 horror unleashed upon the world.

In constructing a Jewish response to climate change, I underscore three recurrent Jewish themes:

Creation Theology

The fundamental assumption that the world is God’s creation and is good is explicit in the Genesis story in the frequently repeated assertion, “And God saw that it was good.” Psalms celebrates the works of nature as extolling God in their own way. Studying his work of creation, the natural world, will teach the human of God’s nature, “Ask the beasts and they will teach you, the birds of the air and they will tell you” (Job 12:7). Fordham theologian Elizabeth Johnson’s book on a theology of the environment is rightly titled *Ask the Beasts*.

Creatureliness situates human beings within creation. Biblical scholar Phyllis Trible pointed to the confluence of humans, God and nature in creation by underscoring that the name Adam, or *adam* in Hebrew, is linked to the word for earth, *adamah*. Thus the best translation of Adam in the second creation story is “earth creature.” Her exegesis of Genesis 2 shows that the earth creature comes from the earth but is also set apart from it, to serve the earth (2:5) and put in the garden to till it and keep it (2:15).⁵

Jewish holidays and rituals help us reflect on our creatureliness. One point of Shabbat is to refrain from actions that change the world and recognize our place within it. One point of Yom Kippur is to touch our human frailty and temporary place in the world. One point of Sukkot is to dwell in rustic, temporary shelters that remind us of the world’s unsteadiness as well as its sacred abundance. One point of Passover is its rootedness in ancient agricultural and pastoral festivals. Ellen Bernstein, who founded the first Jewish environmental organization, *Shomrei Adamah* (Keepers of the Earth) has just published a new Haggadah called *The Promise of the Land* that amplifies these

themes of human connectedness to the earth.⁶

Transforming an anthropocentric model for a theocentric one, we take our place in the choir of creation. We temper the Genesis command to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gn 1:28) — the source of our crisis pointed to by Lynn White, by subordinating it to the command in Genesis 2:15 about the Garden of Eden, “to till it and keep it (*leshamrah*),” or more literally, “to till it and keep watch over it.”

Practicing Modesty

Sumptuary laws from the Middle Ages discouraged conspicuous consumption, wearing ostentatious rich clothing, or giving lavish weddings or circumcision feasts. Whatever the laws’ multiple purposes, the effect would be to manage human pride, to guard people from using up their own resources and to avoid shaming people who had less. They may have also had a purpose to keep a low profile in the larger community, where Jewish success might cause resentment. What it comes down to is cultivating the virtue of modesty.

In some circles modesty, or *tzniut*, brings to mind women covering bare shoulders or wearing long skirts. But it has a broad meaning of decentering the self. Codes of *tzniut* also apply to men and include not talking too loud and not showing off your money.

Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg has proposed that we reclaim *tzniut*, moving off from worrying about women’s and men’s dress, and consider its social imperative as a form of generosity for others and their feelings. She says, “This, then is the core of a new *tzniut*: to dress and behave with a sensitivity both to oneself and one’s deepest needs, and to one’s context, to the reactions of others; to love our neighbors as ourselves in our actions and in our interactions.”⁷

I suggest we should also apply this modesty and love in our relationship to the earth. For example, do not take six napkins at Dunkin Donuts when we only need one. Perhaps refrain from buying another dress that is suspiciously similar to the other six already in your closet. Vote for candidates who pledge to enact environmental legislation.

Let us practice a certain modesty and mindfulness that puts the natural world at the center and respects our small piece of it. The prophet Micah says as much in this famous verse addressed directly to humanity, where he uses a form of the verb that underlies the word *tzniut*, meaning to be humble or modest, or to act with restraint:

He has told you, O Adam, (mortal), what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly or modestly (*hatsnea*) with your God? (Mi 6:8).

To walk modestly cannot be about the length of one's skirt but could mean to tread lightly on the earth, to practice *chesed*, or kindness, to all creatures and to do justice. When one treads the earth with consciousness and awareness of one's dependence on it, then one walks with God.

Promoting Community

Hillel urges, "Do not separate yourself from the community" (*Pirke Avot* 2:4), and much of Jewish ethics goes toward building and maintaining the health of the group. This community does not stop at the borders of the present but extends back to the ancestors and forward to our descendants, the future community:

"Honi the Circle Drawer, a sage, was walking along a road and saw someone planting a carob tree. Honi asked him, 'How long will it take for this tree to bear fruit?' 'Seventy years,' replied the man. Honi then asked, 'Are you so healthy a man that you expect to live that length of time and eat its fruit?' The man answered, 'I found a fruitful world because my ancestors planted it for me. Likewise I am planting for my children'" (*b.Taanit* 23a).

Planting trees is a typical symbol of hope, preparation for the future and leaving an abundant and robust environment behind for our children, grandchildren and beyond. A well-known midrash tries to temper messianism but also carries an environmental prescription, "Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakai used to say: 'If you have a sapling in your hand and they tell you, 'The Messiah is coming!' first plant the sapling and then go to greet him'" (*Avot d'Rabbi Natan* 31b). This source is frequently understood as

a discouragement of messianism, but we should note that it is important to greet the Messiah. However, one should plant one's tree first in case the future is longer than expected and so leave a verdant home for one's offspring.

It is easy to quote sources, but to save our world, we need to create new initiatives and rework the sources. One example is the new Haggadah mentioned above. Another is a new form of the list of sins recited on Yom Kippur. It highlights the sins against the environment as on a scale with sins against God and against other humans.

For the sins of accepting the current distribution of wealth and power as unchangeable;
And for the sins of giving up on social change and focusing exclusively on personal advancement and success;
For the sins of feeling so powerless when we hear about oppression that we finally close our ears.
And for the sins of dulling our outrage at the continuation of poverty, oppression and violence in this world.
And for the sins we have committed by allowing our food and our air to be poisoned;
For the sins of not doing enough to save the environment.⁸

These are related to one another, and like the traditional list of sins, seem to include not just critiquing of indifference and skewering people for their faults but also cautioning against despair as another sort of sin. The environmental problem is so vast and accelerating at such a pace, we feel helpless as individuals.

This is the real challenge. What to do? We feel restless and are sure we are not doing enough. We worry about our children and grandchildren. We do not really know what to do. Well, it is not enough on its own. But we persist in doing good. The rabbis cautioned us, "It is not on you to finish the task, but neither are you free to give up on it" (*Pirke Avot* 2:16).

I would like to end with a new meditation that is available on many Jewish websites, including this one from COEJL, its list of resources from Pope Francis' encyclical on climate justice *Laudato Si'* and from the Sages.⁹ It is a contemporary *kavannah*, or reflection, in which Rabbi Arthur Waskow draws from midrash and Malachi 3:20-24.

Between the Fires

We are the generation that stands
between the fires:

Behind us the flame and smoke that rose
from Auschwitz and from Hiroshima;
From the burning forests of the Amazon,
From the hottest years of human history
that bring upon us

Melted ice fields, Flooded cities,
Scorching droughts.

Before us the nightmare of a Flood of Fire,
The heat and smoke that could
consume all Earth.

Here! We ourselves are coming Before the
great and terrible day of smiting Earth
— For we ourselves shall turn the hearts
Of parents to their children
And the hearts of children to their parents
So that this day of smiting
Does not fall upon us.

It is our task to make from fire not an
all-consuming blaze

But the light in which we see each other
fully.

All of us different, All of us bearing One
Spark.

We light these fires to see more clearly
That the Earth and all who live as part of it
Are not for burning.

We light these fires to see more clearly
The rainbow in our many-colored faces.
Blessed is the One within the many.
Blessed are the many who make One.

Notes

- 1 Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science*, n.s. 155 (1967) 120301207.
- 2 Lawrence Troster, "Ten Jewish Teachings on Judaism and the Environment," <https://circle.org/jsource/ten-jewish-teachings-on-judaism-and-the-environment>.
- 3 Recent scholarship has modified earlier ideas of Judaism as primarily a religion of time, showing a concern for space and place as part of Jewish mapping of identity. Barbara Mann notes the significance of references to God as *HaMakom*, the Place, and shows how Jews have created a sense of place in different periods, *Space and Place in Jewish Studies* (Piscataway, N.J.: Rutgers, 2012). David Kraemer understands the rabbis as trying to resolve the intolerable situation of their "place" being under Roman occupation, *Rabbinic Judaism: Space and Place* (New York: Routledge Press, 2015).
- 4 Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Pied Beauty," one of my favorite poems, reflects this idea.
- 5 Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 75-77; 89-90.
- 6 Ellen Bernstein, *The Promise of the Land. A Passover Haggadah* (Behrman House, 2020).
- 7 Danya Rutenberg, "Towards a New Tzniut," in *The Passionate Torah* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) 209.
- 8 <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/modern-sins/>, reprinted from tikkun.org.
- 9 http://www.coejl.net/uploads/1/2/0/0/120031968/coejl_laudato_si_and_the_sages.pdf. ■

Islam, Nature and Climate Change

Muhammad U. Faruque

In a response to the biannual McGinley lecture by Jesuit Father Patrick J. Ryan, Muhammad U. Faruque discussed Muslim views on climate change. In his time holding the Laurence J. McGinley Professor of Religion and Society at Jesuit-run Fordham University in New York, Father Ryan has focused on dialogue among Christians, Jews and Muslims, and his lectures have included responses from Jewish and Muslim perspectives. The McGinley lecture and responses on climate were due to be given March 31 at Fordham's Manhattan campus and April 1 at the main campus in the Bronx, but were canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic. In talking about approaches to climate change in the Muslim tradition, Faruque, a postdoctoral fellow in Fordham's theology department, said that "the implications of the doctrine of the 'great chain of consciousness' for climate change cannot be overstated." Faruque's response follows.

I

Despite the fact that the novel coronavirus has claimed over 100,000 lives and brought life to a standstill around the globe, it has provided scientists with a rare opportunity to observe that the planet is now shaking noticeably less than usual!¹ The commotion of modern hyperactive industrial life and vibrations from factories, cars, trains, etc., produce tremendous background noise that in turn creates pressure and shakes Earth's core as she struggles to maintain her balance and equilibrium.

But in an age of scientific naturalism, does anyone even care what happens to Mother Nature as a result of our unbridled actions? Is not the Earth supposed to be an inert object, a vast mechanism devoid of life, a mere *it* which is unable to feel anything and, unlike us, defend itself with a human voice?

Yet the naturalistic attitude that can certainly relegate nature to an *it* or an *other*, resulting in its alienation and subsequent estrangement, can no longer deny the silent cries of this *other*, which is now concretely felt through the effects

of climate change around the globe, as Professor Ryan has described so succinctly.

It is thus no coincidence that the crisis of climate change ultimately mirrors the crisis of modern subjectivity, which is largely defined by the Cartesian disengaged *res cogitans* or the thinking thing that pits itself against the rest of creation, now relegated to the status of a soulless machine.² In this mechanistic picture, which still dominates the *weltanschauung* of most science-educated folks, when one encounters a tree one does not usually think of a being that might share our own reality in some way; rather one contemplates utilitarian gains in the form of wood and furniture, or at best, botanical details that may be of interest from a purely scientific point of view.

So it is crucial to note that unless we are able to come to terms with ourselves, that is, redefine our very selfhood, we will not be able to confront climate change at the deepest level, since an erroneous view of the self will only exacerbate our relationship with and treatment of the other, which is none other than Mother Nature. Put another way, when nature's only worth comes as a resource to be usurped by the human self, it is used and reused as a means of serving the self's materialistic goals such as luxury and wealth accumulation.

For the remainder of this response, I will elaborate on the Islamic teachings concerning nature, selfhood and human responsibility, and briefly document some of the salient aspects of contemporary Muslim environmentalism. Overall, my aim is to draw attention to both theoretical and practical dimensions of the environmental crisis, since without an adequate conception of nature as a sacred reality, we will not be able to alter our attitude toward it.

II

Since Islamic civilization has produced a vast intellectual tradition, it would be pertinent to begin with philosophico-scientific conceptions of nature that are found in the works of philosophers such as Avicenna (d. 1037). For instance, in his *Physics* within the encyclopedic *Kitab al-Shifa'* (Book of the Healing), Avicenna notes that the term nature (*tabi'a*) can be understood in various ways such as the efficient cause of motion in natural bodies, or that which constitutes the sub-

stance of everything, or that which makes a thing what it is.

Recognizing the interrelatedness of the above-mentioned meanings, Avicenna eventually defines nature as an active principle of motion and rest in natural bodies.³ Now such an Aristotelian definition of nature does serve its purpose when it comes to premodern scientific theories of "motion," but it does not bring out the "ecstatic" and "poetic" dimensions of nature, which are so crucial to developing an existential connection with it by tapping into one's ecological consciousness. In other words, similar to the Thomist vs. Franciscan spirit, in Islam too one observes a distinction between "scientific" and "poetic" views of nature.

The poetic and aesthetic view of nature is articulated in several verses of the Quran, which later inspired numerous Sufis and philosophers such as Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240), Rumi (d. 1273), 'Aziz al-Din Nasafi (d. 1278), Mahmud Shabistari (d. ca. 1318), and Mulla Sadra (d. 1640) to formulate an elaborate ecophilosophy.

The Quran discusses the significance of nature extensively. Numerous Quranic chapters bear the names of natural entities or phenomena such as "The Cow," "The Bee," "The Thunder," "The Moon," "The Star," "The Ants," "The Spider," "The Light," "The Iron" and "The Rock," as well as others. Moreover, to convey the sacredness of nature God swears in the Quran by the moon, the sun, the olive and other natural entities.

The Quran refers to natural phenomena as *ayat Allah*, or God's signs, symbols or verses. This means just as one is supposed to read and contemplate the verses of the Quran, one is asked to study and decipher various natural phenomena that are like countless signposts meant to guide the self toward its ultimate destiny and to behold the beauty of God's never-ending self-manifestation.⁴

As the Quran says, "We shall show them Our signs (*ayat*) on the horizons and within themselves until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth" (Q 41:53). In other words, following Augustine, one may speak of two books in which God reveals himself, namely the Book of Revelation (i.e., the Quran) and the Book of Nature, both of which mirror one another.

Not surprisingly, Muslim thinkers talk about the Quran in terms of the written Quran (*al-Quran al-tadwini*) and the cosmic Quran (*al-Quran al-takwini*). For

example, *Ibn 'Arabi* refers to the world as the great text (*al-mushaf al-kabir*), while Nasafi explains that the natural world is one of God's books in which each day sets forth its chapters, verses, lines and letters for human beings to ponder. Similarly, the Persian Sufi Shabistari refers to the universe as a book of revelation, with substances (*jawahir*) as consonants, accidents (*araad*) as vowels and different creatures as verses, where various entities parallel various Quranic chapters.⁵

However, the nexus between the Book of Nature and the Book of Revelation runs deeper in that the aforementioned verses mention the self (*nafs*), which is also one of the loci of *ayat Allah*, or the theater for divine self-disclosure. Thus, in addition to the two books, there is also what I would call the Book of Selfhood, which is the mediating principle or consciousness between the Book of Revelation and the Book of Nature. One can mention the famous 15th-century Ottoman Sufi, jurist and Shaykh al-Islam Shams al-Din Fanari in this regard, whose exegetical work *Ayn al-a'yan* shows a synthesis of philosophy, mysticism and Quranic exegesis by drawing parallels between levels of existence, consciousness, divine speech and Quranic meanings.

In one of the most enigmatic verses of the Quran, God proclaims that all beings in the cosmos sing his praise: "The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein glorify him, and there is not a thing but hymneth his glory; but ye understand not their glory" (Q. 17:44). Such a verse is bound to raise eyebrows, since we do not hear inanimate entities such as rocks and mountains singing God's glory. Rumi has a rejoinder for those who would cast doubt upon the literal interpretation of this verse. For Rumi the problem lies in one's inability to understand the language of Being and to penetrate into the innermost reality of natural phenomena, each of which possesses their own particular mode of consciousness and glorification.

Rumi also rhetorically asks how can we expect people to understand the glorification of inanimate entities when they themselves, despite being language animals, are unable to understand each other, which is the reason they are divided into so many sects and denominations. Rumi writes:

Each glorifies Thee in a different fashion,
and that one is unaware of the state of

this one.

Humans disbelieve in the glorification
uttered by inanimate things,
but those inanimate things are masters in
performing worship.

Nay, the two-and-seventy sects, every one,
are unaware of each other and in
great doubt.

Since two speakers have no knowledge of
each other's state,
how will it be with wall and door?
Since I am heedless of the glorification
uttered by one who speaks,
how should my heart perceive the
glorification of that which is mute?⁶

Rumi then concludes by saying that only the spiritually adept whose inner vision is awakened by the eye of the heart can perceive the mystery of every creature's distinct mode of glorification:

No one knows except the deified human
in whose heart is a spiritual touchstone.
The rest hold only an opinion;
they fly to their nest with a single wing.⁷

It is fascinating to see that in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis has mentioned the Sufi al-Khawwas, who also echoes Rumi by affirming that the subtle mystery in each of the movements and sounds of nature can only be perceived by the mystical initiate. Thus, the Quranic ecophilosophy presents a perspective in which all levels of the reality of nature are interconnected, forming, as it were, a living whole.⁸ Such a view has been aptly described as the "great chain of being" or *maratib al-wujud* in both Islamic and Western traditions. In the poetic rendering of Alexander Pope:

Vast chain of being, which from
God began,
Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,
Beast, bird, fish, insect! what no eye
can see,
No glass can reach! from infinite to thee ...
*Where, one step broken, the great scale's
destroyed.*⁹

But if Rumi and others are right, the great chain of being cannot be devoid of consciousness, which is why it is also the "great chain of consciousness," a phrase appropriately coined by Mohammed Rustom.¹⁰ Following the previous line of reasoning, one can say that everything in nature, including nature itself, is imbued

with consciousness, whose alpha and omega is Pure Consciousness, that is, divine reality in itself. But if each thing in nature manifests a particular mode of God's consciousness, it implies that even the so-called inanimate objects are alive and conscious in varying degrees.

Such a perspective is not to be confused with contemporary panpsychism as expounded by atheist philosophers such as Galen Strawson and Philip Goff, who also argue that consciousness pervades all of reality including matter — a view laden with ecological implications.¹¹ Similarly, when Muslim mystics and philosophers assert that nature is sacred, they do not suggest that it is also divine, for that will lead to pantheism.

Sufi metaphysicians such as Ibn 'Arabi and Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi (d. 1274) make clear that God's immanence in nature through divine presence and manifestation does not negate his transcendence in relation to it, since for these thinkers, God *qua* Absolute (*al-mutlaq*) transcends all limitations and determinations.¹² Thus, the transcendence of God (i.e. the Divine Essence) negates both pantheism and contemporary panpsychism.

At any rate, the upshot of all these doctrines is that nature cannot be treated as merely a source of raw materials to be exploited by humans nor can it be seen as a material reality devoid of spiritual significance and beauty. Rather, nature is to be respected as a sacred reality and loved by those who believe it vehicles divine presence.¹³

III

The implications of the doctrine of the "great chain of consciousness" for climate change cannot be overstated. It calls for a radical reorientation of modern subjectivity and urges us to study, contemplate and understand nature, and protect it from senseless economic exploitation. Moreover, one should not think that the environmental crisis can be solved by a careful economic planning or social activism alone, both of which are doubtless important. In addition to various forms of environmental activism, one needs to educate oneself about the alternative conceptions of nature and take them seriously on their own terms. It would be a mistake to think that the ecospiritual ideas presented above have little practical import, since they run counter to our Cartesian view of nature.

Let me provide a concrete example to illustrate this. Some years ago, the Yale-trained legal scholar and social scientist Boaventura Santos was invited to chair an ethical tribunal concerning the highly disputed Yasuní ITT project in Amazonia.¹⁴ The Yasuní ITT project was an alternative to the oil-extraction capitalist model that is responsible for the disappearance of two entire Amazonian peoples, namely the Tetetes and the Sansahauris between 1960 and 1990.

In the middle of a heated exchange, a man stood up and asked Boaventura the following: “Professor Boaventura, you are a well-known sociologist and lawyer and so on, so you know all these kinds of things about nature and about law. Please, tell me something, *these Indians are crazy, aren't they? How can we give rights to an object?*!”¹⁵

Boaventura responded by saying that if we remain dogmatic about the Cartesian view of nature (i.e., nature as an inert object), which is what we are taught in school, then we can never understand the indigenous people's concept of nature as *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) that says that nature is the source of life, a living organism that also sustains life.¹⁶

For these indigenous people, our blood is part of the blood of the earth. Thus, if you extract oil, you extract the blood of the Mother Earth, thereby extracting your own blood.¹⁷ Needless to say, one can provide countless similar examples that show the disastrous consequences of upholding a Cartesian view of nature.¹⁸

So what is required is an attitude of openness toward alternative ways of experiencing the self and the world or what Boaventura calls the “epistemologies of the South.” Fortunately, environmental awareness is growing among people. Recent studies show how diverse Muslim communities and schools of thought from around the world are addressing ecological issues through Islamic ethics and ecophilosophy.¹⁹

The space allotted will not permit me to mention various forms of Muslim environmentalism that one observes today, but let me at least say a word about the fascinating phenomenon of “Islamic permaculture.” *Permaculture* (a term coined by the biologist Bill Mollison) is a holistic way of being that integrates land, people, resources and the environment through mutually beneficial synergies.

In its Islamic appropriation, permac-

ulture seeks to enhance biodiversity on Earth in line with the Quranic ecophilosophy of nature and the self that speaks of the human stewardship of all living beings, including the Earth and the environment.²⁰ Islamic permaculture takes seriously the doctrine of the great chain of consciousness, according to which there is a web of interconnectedness among all beings, both biologically and spiritually.²¹

Iskandar Waworuntu and Umar Faruq Abd-Allah are both converts, Sufi-influenced and miles apart from each other since the former lives in Indonesia while the latter in America. Yet both are united when it comes to their deep immersion in Islamic permaculture.

In 2006, Iskandar built the Bumi Langit permaculture farm in Imogiri, Indonesia, where they produce food by practicing permaculture and offer training on eco-friendly agriculture.²² Thus, there is reason for hope amid the catastrophes caused by the environmental crisis and the desecralization of nature.

As the environmentalist Vandana Shiva puts it beautifully: “Our future is inseparable from the future of the Earth. It is no accident that the word *human* has its roots in *humus*, the Latin word for soil. Adam, the first human in the Abrahamic traditions, is derived from *Adamah*, meaning soil in Hebrew.”²³

“From the [earth] did We create you, and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again.” (Q 20:55).

Notes

- 1 See <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/coronavirus-lockdown-earth-move-vibrate-seismic-noise-thomas-lecocq-a9445346.html>.
- 2 The genealogy of modern subjectivity is a highly complex topic, which is beyond the scope of the present endeavor. For some debates, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
- 3 Avicenna, *al-Shifa' (al-Tabi'iyat, al-sama' al-tabi')*, edited by Sa'id Zayid (Qum, 1985), 36ff.
- 4 See Quran 2:164, 3:190-191, 6:99, 10:6, 10:67, 13:3-4, 16:69, 20:53-54, 24:44-46, 26:7-9, 27:86, 29:44, 36:33-44, 41:37-40, 41:53, 42:29, 45:1-13, 51:20-23.
- 5 See Munjed Murad, “Sufi Views of Nature and Natural Phenomena,” *Brill Encyclopedia of Islamic Mysticism*, forthcoming.
- 6 Rumi, *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*, edited and translated by R.A. Nicholson (London, 1925-40), III: 1496-1500.
- 7 Rumi *Mathnawi*, III: 1508-09.
- 8 The 17th-century philosopher Mulla Sadra develops a highly complex philosophy of a dynamic universe in which everything is interconnected through the penetration and unfolding of existence: “The abode of existence is one, and the whole universe is a big living being. Its dimensions are conjoined with one another but not in the sense of the conjunction of measurement

and the unification of surfaces and environs. Rather, what is meant is that each degree of existential perfection must be adjacent to a degree that befits it in (a similar) existential perfection.” Mulla Sadra, *Asfar*, II, 2, 342, cited in Ibrahim Kalin, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mulla Sadra on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 230.

- 9 Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Man,” in *Major Works*, edited by Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 279. *Italic mine*. Cf. Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964).
- 10 Mohammed Rustom, “The Great Chain of Consciousness: Do All Things Possess Awareness?” *Renovatio* 1.1 (2017): 49-60.
- 11 Curiously, Mulla Sadra's philosophy of being (*wujud*) also presents a version of panpsychism, which, however, rests on very different ontological grounds.
- 12 Cf. Q 4:126 that says, “Allah ever surroundeth all things.” The term *muhit* in this verse also means “environment,” implying that the world of nature is steeped in divine presence.
- 13 In Sufi metaphysics, divine presence varies in terms of its degree of manifestation. Thus, on the lowest plane of reality, i.e. the physical world, the intensity of divine presence is also the lowest. For an in-depth analysis of the famous doctrine of the “five divine presences” (*al-hadarat al-ilahiyat al-khams*), see William Chittick, “The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qunawi to al-Qaysari,” *The Muslim World* 72.2 (1982): 107-28.
- 14 Boaventura Santos, “Epistemologies of the South and the Future,” *From the European South: a transdisciplinary journal of postcolonial humanities*, 1 (2016): 17-29, at 24.
- 15 Santos, “Epistemologies of the South,” 25. *Italic mine*.
- 16 Santos, *ibid.*, 25.
- 17 Santos, *ibid.*, 24.
- 18 One can mention, for instance, the Chipko movement in the Himalayas, where indigenous women and men organized protests against commercial exploitation of the Himalayan forests by foreign contractors. See Vandana Shiva, “Swaraj: From Chipko to Navdanya,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology*, edited by John Hart (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley & Sons, 2017), 12-14.
- 19 Numerous studies on Muslim environmentalism are now available. See e.g. Anna Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); and Richard Foltz (ed.), *Environmentalism in the Muslim World* (New York, Nova, 2005). For works on Islamic environmental philosophy, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Tarik Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2013).
- 20 The political meaning of *khalifa* (vicegerent) as the person who rules over the Islamic world is well known. But for Sufis the word also has a metaphysical meaning, which is expressed through the complex doctrine of the perfect human (*al-insan al-kamil*). In simple terms, the doctrine expresses one's latent capacity for wholeness and perfection, including the capacity for human flourishing. According to Sufis, human beings are God's vicegerent on earth because they are charged with the stewardship of the cosmos, suggesting that it is their duty to safeguard the order of nature and maintain equilibrium in the cosmos. Note, however, that this ethicospiritual imperative is not a given, which means every individual self has to attain the station of vicegerency by leading an ethical life and purifying their heart. As the Quran says, “Truly he flourishes that purifies the [self]” (Q 91:9). So, I am in agreement with Professor Ryan that *faijah* as “human flourishing” is a central idea in Islam.
- 21 Such a view closely parallels McDaniel's ecotheological paradigm, see Jay McDaniel, “Ecotheology and World Religions,” in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, edited by Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 21-44.
- 22 On *Bumi Langit*, see <http://www.bumilangit.org/indonesian/index.html>. For Abd-Allah's involvement in permaculture, see the lively, short documentary at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WjcknxZOrQ&t=791s>.
- 23 Shiva, “Swaraj,” 19. ■

Readers: Due to the coronavirus pandemic, most events are being canceled. The following events have either been canceled, postponed or moved online.

***May 28-30**

College Theology Society and National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion Annual Convention. Theme: "Human Families: Identities, Relationships and Responsibilities." HELD ONLINE. Register: www.collegetheology.org/event-3815401

June 2-6

National Association for Lay Ministry. POSTPONED TO JUNE 2021.

June 5-7

Society of Catholic Scientists. POSTPONED TO JUNE 2021.

June 7-9

Catholic Health Association of the U.S. Assembly. CANCELED.

June 10-12

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Spring General Assembly. CANCELED.

June 11-14

Catholic Theological Society of America Annual Convention. CANCELED.

June 22-25

European Academy of Religion Annual Conference. CANCELED.

June 22-25

Virtual Assembly of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests WILL TAKE PLACE ONLINE. Theme: "Our Catholic Faith in the Political World." Register: <https://auscp.org>

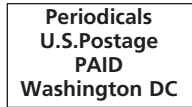
June 22-25

International Conference on Receptive Ecumenism. POSTPONED TO JUNE 30-JULY 3, 2021.

June 22-25 and June 29-July 2

Notre Dame University's McGrath Institute for Church Life's Liturgy Week and its Symposium on Teaching Life and Human Dignity. CANCELED.

*signifies new entry



On File

Pope Francis has agreed with a recommendation by the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life to postpone by one year the next gatherings of the World Meeting of Families and World Youth Day. "Because of the current health situation and its consequences on the movement and gatherings of young people and families," the World Meeting of Families in Rome will be pushed back until June 2022 and World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, will be pushed back until August 2023, the Vatican announced. Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the dicastery, told Catholic News Service April 20 that now is the time his office would be signing contracts with hotels and airlines if the World Meeting of Families were still to be held in 2021, "but no one knows what will happen," so it seemed prudent to push the meeting back a year. The dicastery also would not hold two large gatherings during the same summer, so that was one reason World Youth Day was pushed back, he said. The other reason, Cardinal Farrell said, is that although people are talking about "returning to normal" and government leaders are making plans for phasing out lockdowns and reopening businesses, "we do not believe travel will be that extensive" anytime soon.

The chairmen of four U.S. bishops' conference committees, joined by the leaders of several health care, bioethics and pro-life organi-

zations, "urgently and respectfully" implored the commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to ensure any vaccines developed for the coronavirus "are free from any connection to abortion. To be clear, we strongly support efforts to develop an effective, safe and widely available vaccine as quickly as possible," the leaders said in an April 17 letter to Dr. Stephen M. Hahn, the FDA commissioner. "However, we also strongly urge our federal government to ensure that fundamental moral principles are followed in the development of such vaccines, most importantly, the principle that human life is sacred and should never be exploited," they said. Copies of the letter were sent to President Donald Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and Health and Human Services Secretary Alex M. Azar. The text of the letter was released late April 17 by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The chairmen who signed it and their respective USCCB committees were: Archbishop Joseph E. Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, Committee on Pro-Life Activities; Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, Domestic Justice and Human Development Committee; Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, Committee on Doctrine; and Bishop John F. Doerfler of Marquette, Michigan, the Subcommittee on Health Care Issues, which is a subcommittee of the doctrine committee.