

1 **ON BECOMING STEWARDS OF THE EARTH: A MORAL RESPONSIBILITY**
2 **A Background Paper on Climate Change and the Environment**
3 **For Interfaith Impact of New York State – by Richard S. Gilbert, President**
4 **May 2016**

5
6 "Nature sustains itself through three precious principles, which one does well to embrace and follow. These
7 are gentleness, frugality and humility."

8 Lao Tzu

9
10 "Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It was lent to you by your children."

11 Kenyan proverb

12
13 "We behave as if we were the last generation to inhabit the planet."

14 Biologist Rene Dubos

15
16 "We are using up the world."

17 Poet Wendell Berry

18
19 "We can't claim ignorance. We have thought the earth 'too big to fail,' but that is not true.... We are in
20 danger, but we have hit a 'sweet spot' where we can still change our behavior and save our planetary home.
21 How lucky we are. This is an opportunity that may never come again."¹

22 Marine biologist Sylvia Earle

23
24 **GOD'S OWN JUNKYARD: STATE OF THE ARK 2016**

25
26 In 1989 Dr. James E. Hansen, then of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Goddard
27 Institute for Space Studies, issued a stern warning on the danger of global climate change. However, the
28 White House Office of Management and Budget rewrote Hansen's scientific conclusions, contending
29 humanity's contribution to the greenhouse effect "remains scientifically unknown." It was evidently feared
30 such information would harm the economy. Subsequent studies by NASA and the Intergovernmental Panel
31 on Climate Change, among many other scientific organizations, have resulted in an overwhelming
32 consensus that (1) global climate change is occurring; (2) the earth is warming; (3) human activity is
33 substantially responsible, and (4) this process has deleterious impact on humanity's planetary home,
34 especially on the poor and powerless.

35
36 Climate change is not merely an environmental or political or economic problem. It is a moral problem. It
37 is the obligation of people of faith to speak and act to save humanity from itself - to protect our global
38 home. We underscore the urgency of the papal encyclical *Laudato Si*, in which Pope Francis discussed the
39 grave implications of climate change and called on all people, not just Catholics, to protect the earth – "the
40 common inheritance of all."² We face a global ecological calamity which has been importantly addressed
41 by world leaders as they signed the Paris climate change accord April 22, 2016, at United Nations
42 headquarters in New York.

43
44 As two Catholic bishops, the Most Reverend Oscar Cantu and the Most Reverend Broderick Pabillo – from
45 North and South – put it: "We try to ensure that the powerless are heard and the powerful are engaged." We
46 echo their words: "Confronting climate change is our moral obligation." They state: "Climate change
47 threatens all life - and the life cycle of the earth itself. Climate change attacks the human dignity of those
48 most affected, with the least fortunate bearing a disproportionate burden from its impacts. What the
49 scientific consensus tells us, and what real observations and experiences around the world have shown us,
50 is that humanity's current reliance on fossil fuels is altering the atmosphere. Warmer oceans and higher
51 temperatures are already being connected with increased sea levels, storm surges, rainfall intensities and
52 droughts, as well as disruptions in growing seasons and migratory patterns."³

53

54 In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis noted the role of human technology in creating an earth-circling crisis:
55 "Technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels - especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser
56 degree, gas - needs to be progressively replaced without delay." Our civilization has become so dependent
57 on fossil fuels that we face a painful transition to renewable energy. The task will not become easier by
58 delay. It is literally a matter of life and death.

59

60 Clearly we who live in the global north are disproportionately responsible for carbon pollution. Our way of
61 life has been based on fossil fuels, to which we have become addicted. We have a moral obligation to
62 reduce carbon pollution, to protect people from climate impacts and to safeguard human health and public
63 welfare. This predicament calls upon us to practice human solidarity in which the common good of all
64 transcends the narrow self-interest of the few. Pope Francis calls this practice repaying an "ecological
65 debt."

66

67 We have reached an environmental milestone – of which we should not be proud: there are now over 400
68 parts per million of carbon dioxide in earth’s atmosphere, a point not reached for three million years in the
69 Pliocene epoch when the earth was unbearably hot and sea levels as much as 60 or 80 feet higher; it was
70 280 parts two centuries ago.....and we add to it every time we turn on a switch.⁴ We are reminded of our
71 predicament in the wake of a record-shattering, oppressively hot, dry year: 2015 was the hottest on record –
72 the first few months of 2016 exceed the prior year’s record. Creation groaned. The earth speaks back. We
73 may overheat the globe to extinction.

74

75 The urgency of the scientists is often met with indifference by the citizenry and denial by the politicians.
76 That response denies the inconvenient truth that human activity exacerbates global warming and in time
77 will produce disastrous consequences. While it is easy to label those who warn of environmental calamity
78 “Cassandras,” it is tempting to take the easy path and do nothing. This tendency to minimize environmental
79 damage is hedging our global bets. It is a dangerous gamble.

80

81

82

83 In a fascinating article in the May 10, 1967 issue of *Science*, Lynn White of U.C.L.A. contended that our
84 present state of ecological backlash is mounting feverishly. He traced the human tendency to exploit nature
85 back to the Jewish and Christian conceptions of creation in which God creates all living things to serve
86 humanity. White contended that this theology began to have practical results several generations ago with
87 the fusion of science and technology – a marriage of the theoretical and the empirical. Thus humanity was
88 able to control its environment to an unprecedented degree. Humanity became increasingly divorced from
89 nature, which was compelled to do its bidding. Humanity was the master, nature the slave.

90

91 White cast his eyes on the story of creation in which humans named the animals and established its
92 dominion over them. Creation had only one purpose - to serve human beings. Christianity, according to
93 White, was the most anthropocentric religion in the world and therefore the most activist one. Eastern
94 religions, he contended, were contemplative, nature oriented and quiescent. As a result, he believed that
95 "despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature,
96 contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim."⁵

97

98 In Genesis we read: “And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the
99 earth and *subdue* it, and have dominion over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves
100 upon the earth’ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” (*Revised
101 Standard Bible*)

102

103 Judaism and early Christianity represent a transition from pagan earth-centered traditions to the so-called
104 high religions. That transition is seen in the prophet Isaiah: “For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth

105 with peace. The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing and the trees of the field
106 shall clap their hands,” a clearly animistic text, attributing human gestures to non-human organisms. And in
107 the Book of Job, the Lord’s voice out of the whirlwind is a reminder of humanity’s basic humility in the
108 great scheme of things. “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”⁶ Indeed, where were
109 we? Who do we think we are, anyway? Whereas pagan religion was non-violent toward the earth, the
110 western religious tradition, emboldened by Genesis, too often thought of the earth as a mine to be exploited
111 rather than a garden to be cultivated.

112
113 The central sin of this tradition was to see humanity as distinct from nature - above nature - and not an
114 integral part of it. This was in direct contrast to the paganism which Christianity replaced in its rise to
115 power – a paganism which for all its superstition saw divinity in all living things. To quote Professor White
116 at this point: “Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or damned a brook, it was important to placate the
117 spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated. By destroying pagan animism,
118 Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to natural objects.”⁷

119
120 The Christian God was transcendent - above and beyond, but not really in nature. Creation was seen as a
121 revelation of the divine mentality, and knowledge about that creation was a way of deducing what God said
122 to humanity. In the 13th century this natural theology took a dramatic new turn as humanity sought to know
123 the divine mind by discovering how his creation operated. The faint stirrings of the scientific revolution
124 were being felt. Scientists expressed hope of being able to “think God’s thoughts after him.” It was not
125 until the late 18th century, as White pointed out, that scientists were able to do without the God hypothesis.

126
127 But the groundwork had been laid for exploiting the environment. Assuming that the earth was here to
128 serve humanity, humankind began to exploit its abundance for its own comfort. The scientific revolution
129 was wedded to technical skills, and the technological revolution was underway with its unthinking and
130 unfeeling exploitation of nature.

131
132 The 16th century saw the rise of what has become known as “the Protestant work ethic,” now secularized as
133 simply the work ethic. Detailed by sociologist of religion Max Weber,⁸ the theological and ethical meaning
134 can be summarized as follows: Theologian John Calvin elaborated the idea of pre-destination; that is, at
135 birth people are pre-destined by God to go to Heaven or Hell. How is one to know one’s eternal
136 destination? God blesses the virtuous with material success; God punishes the less than virtuous with
137 material poverty. Thus, motivation to succeed, to produce economically, was not only a material incentive
138 but a theological one. The rapid rise of industrialization can be in part traced to this strong religious
139 motivation, along with a near-total disregard for the fate of the earth environmentally.

140
141 As the late Roman Catholic scholar Thomas Merton wrote: “The elementary Christian duty of the Puritan
142 settler was to combat, reduce, destroy and transform the wilderness. This was God’s work.... American
143 capitalist culture is firmly rooted in a secularized Christian myth and mystique of struggle with nature. The
144 basic article of faith in this mystique is that you prove your worth by overcoming and dominating the
145 natural world by transforming nature into wealth.”⁹

146
147 And so from the beginning of this heritage Western humanity was the dominant creature; saw itself as the
148 center of the universe and all its processes in history. Humanity did subdue the earth – but now faces an
149 ecological backlash; affluence has been transformed into effluence; humanity was fruitful, did multiply and
150 now threatens to overpopulate itself into oblivion. As biologist Rene Dubos said: “We behave as if we were
151 the last generation to inhabit the earth.”

152
153 Of course, there are alternative views of biblical creation. Poet and environmentalist Wendell Berry points
154 out that there is another translation of biblical creation stories. In the earlier *King James Bible* we read, “Be
155 fruitful, and multiply, and *replenish* the earth, and subdue it.” There is still sanction for the population
156 explosion, still we are admonished to subdue the earth, but there is that divine caveat - we are to *replenish*

157 the earth – to be good stewards. The earth is not so much a mine which will one day run out, but a garden
158 which continually replenishes itself – with a little help from the gardener.

159
160 Berry resurrects the concept of “Usufruct,” the right of temporary possession, use, or enjoyment of the
161 advantages of property belonging to another without causing damage or harm.¹⁰ In this case the property
162 really belongs to Nature, the earth, or God. He concludes that “It is our present principled and elaborately
163 rationalized rape and plunder of the natural world that is a new thing under the sun.”¹¹ He calls for a new
164 sense of a biblical ecology.

165
166 Lynn White singled out Francis of Assisi as one who believed in the virtue of humility - not merely for the
167 individual but for humanity as a species. And, of course, Francis’ hymn to the sun and moon and stars
168 suggested humanity's oneness with nature. White called upon his readers to reject the “Christian axiom that
169 nature has no reason for existence save to serve humanity." If we rid ourselves of that arrogance, he
170 believed, we can begin to solve our ecologic crisis.

171 172 **TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF ECOLOGY**

173
174 A theology of ecology begins with the earth as a sacred garden to be tended, not a mine to be exploited.
175 The earth is viewed as a holy treasure which it is our human responsibility to protect, as well as our
176 privilege to enjoy. This theology of ecology leads to an environmental ethic that states the earth has moral
177 rights. Interfaith Impact believes that individuals and groups must adopt this theology and take such an
178 ethic seriously.

179
180 People of faith need a positive doctrine of creation as sacred. Primitive humanity held nature sacred as they
181 saw the divine in every living thing. Judaism celebrates the earth. Christianity sees creation as sacred
182 because of a transcendent Creator God. Those who may have jettisoned a transcendent God need not throw
183 out the idea of the sacred at the same time. A view of reality which encompasses the dynamic evolving and
184 naturalistic forces of the universe ought to embody the sacred fully as much. Humanity’s sense of awe and
185 wonder at the cosmos is enhanced, not diminished, by its understanding of the creative thrust of the
186 universe operating within a framework of natural laws. Every living creature becomes, then, a
187 manifestation of this noble process.

188
189 We are compelled to humility. The earth we stride is part of the cosmic divinity in which we live. The
190 globe on which we live is sacred to its very core. The animals with which we share the air and water and
191 space do delight us, yet they are not here just for our pleasure. They are something of value in and of
192 themselves. As is the earth which we co-habit.

193
194 A theology of ecology views humanity as a part of nature, a creature subject to its inexorable laws like any
195 creature, not a God-chosen creature for whom this creation exists. This will require the sparsely distributed
196 virtue of humility. It will require understanding creation as a community of living creatures and non-living
197 things. One cannot, then, speak of humanity *and* nature, but of humanity *in* nature.

198
199 Albert Schweitzer suggests this credo when he writes: “The great fault of all ethics hitherto has been that
200 they believed themselves to have to deal only with the relation of humanity to humanity.” Theologically
201 and ethically, people of faith do well to adopt Schweitzer's "reverence for life" as a core ethical concept. He
202 suggests this moral feeling comes, not deductively from belief in God, but inductively, intuitively from
203 human beings. We experience a will to live; being like others, we may infer they experience that same will
204 to live - a will which should be honored. Common sense and observation tells us that other animals have a
205 will to live - that, too, should be honored.

206

207 The late social critic Norman Cousins said it well: "Reverence for life is more than solicitude or sensitivity
208 for life. It is a sense of the whole, a capacity for wonder, a respect for the intricate universe of individual
209 life. It is the supreme awareness of awareness itself. It is pride in being."¹²
210

211 Environmentalist Aldo Leopold laid down a basic ecological ethic when he wrote: "A thing is right when it
212 tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends
213 otherwise."
214

215 It is an old problem - hubris - the sin of pride - the sense of self as the center of the cosmos. Humanity has
216 always struggled to build cooperative community in the competitive jungle. Now the stakes are higher than
217 they have ever been – humanity's survival as a species. The environmental crisis has taught us - cooperate
218 or die. It will not be enough to say with Pogo: "We have met the enemy and he is us." Saving the
219 environment is not only an individual, but also a social problem.
220

221 Who owns the earth? Clearly, we do not own the earth. We are merely its trustees, its stewards. Religiously
222 speaking, the planet is our parish.
223

224 But does the *earth* have moral rights? University of Southern California law professor Christopher Stone's
225 seminal book *Do Trees Have Standing?* narrates the 1969 story of the Sierra Club taking Walt Disney
226 Productions to court over its intended \$35 million commercial development of Mineral King Valley, a
227 wilderness area in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The judge dismissed the case because the Sierra Club
228 lacked legal "standing;" none of its members would be directly and adversely affected by the proposed
229 development. The case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. Stone hastily wrote a bold manuscript
230 claiming that natural objects like trees ought to have some kind of legal standing - after all, their very
231 existence was jeopardized. Stone worked with an editor friend who slipped the essay into a law review
232 issue on the environment for which Justice William O. Douglas was to write an introductory essay. This
233 outdoors enthusiast would have to read the essay before he penned the preface. The Sierra Club lost the
234 case, but in his dissenting opinion, Douglas made reference to Stone's essay, entering into legal discourse
235 the idea that natural objects have legal standing. We might take the issue one step further, moving beyond
236 legality to morality, and more broadly put asking, does the earth itself have moral rights?
237

238 While we agree persons have rights, do birds and bees and trees and rivers and mountains have a right to
239 exist on their own? Are they here solely for our pleasure or do they have intrinsic worth, so we must use
240 them conservatively? When we see a redwood, do we think picnic table? When we see a field of flowers,
241 do we think housing development?
242

243 We are nature. We are part of the earth family. When we wantonly and needlessly take non-renewable
244 resources from the earth we are guilty of ecocide. Actions have consequences.
245

246 Ecology, the science of planetary housekeeping, as ecologist Barry Commoner defines it, has four basic
247 laws. First, everything is connected to everything else on this thin skin of air, water, soil and sunlight. This
248 reminds one of the poet Francis Thompson's couplet: "Thou canst not stir a flower, without troubling of a
249 star." Commoner, using somewhat less poetic imagery, likens the inter-relationship of all that is to the role
250 of the helm, compass, rudder and ship. All must work in concert if the course is to be kept straight. One
251 malfunction by any part, throws the whole ship off course.
252

253 Secondly, everything must go somewhere, which is a layman's way of stating a basic law of physics -
254 matter is indestructible. In such a system there is no such thing as waste. What we know as waste must be
255 put somewhere or changed into something else. It will not go away. One end result of our failure to realize
256 this law was the *de facto* "death" of Lake Erie by the pollutants humans have introduced into her once blue
257 waters. Lake Erie, happily, has substantially recovered due to an environmental ethic. Adirondack lakes

258 have been “targets” of air pollution from Midwestern power plant smokestacks. Remedial action has been
259 taken. However, these episodes remind us that as residents of one earth, "we all live downstream."

260
261 A third law states: nature knows best. Any human-made change in the environment has the potential of
262 being detrimental. We discover the truth of this through the work of the United Nations which has
263 documented with irrefutable evidence the reality of climate change – global warming in particular. It has
264 also demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt that human activity plays a major role in this problem. We do
265 well to learn the ecological laws of nature and abide by them.

266
267 Finally, there is no such thing as free lunch. Every gain in the environment will be made only at some cost.
268 That cost can be delayed but not allayed. While we squander mineral resources, we must recognize they are
269 non-renewable. What took nature centuries to create cannot be replicated by humanity except with severe
270 environmental consequences. The transition from a fossil-fuel based economy to a green economy will
271 come at a high cost. But is there any alternative? Mere gestures will not do, nor will powerful rhetoric.

272
273 A green economy, built upon a theology of ecology and an environmental ethic, will require two things: (1)
274 a radical change in individual life-styles as we shift from wasteful use of resources to those that are
275 renewable; and (2) a systemic change in how political and economic systems use natural resources and deal
276 creatively with environmental waste. A useful theme in moving toward a green economy comes from
277 Buddhist Economics which urges us to "obtain the maximum of well-being with the minimum of
278 consumption."

279
280 The affluent will need to celebrate a theology of relinquishment – voluntarily acting against their self-
281 interest, lowering a dangerously luxurious standard of living so that resources might be distributed more
282 equitably. The difficulty of the trade-off between economic growth and ecological stewardship is illustrated
283 in a *Wall Street Journal* article which pointed out that "We can save as much as 75% of our electricity, but
284 may never do so because business requires paybacks of less than 3 years."¹³ Our ecological ethic must
285 think in terms, not of years, but of generations.

286
287 Jean Mayer, former President of Tufts University and an expert on hunger, some years ago warned, "It's
288 the rich – in a relative sense, the people less likely to starve – who wreck the environment. Rich people
289 occupy much more space, consume more of each natural resource, disturb the ecology more, litter the
290 landscape with bottles and paper, and pollute more land, air and water with chemical, thermal and
291 radioactive waste. . . . It might be bad in China with 700 million poor people, but 700 million very rich
292 Chinese would wreck China in no time. It's the spread of wealth that threatens the environment."¹⁴

293
294 A theology of ecology must give birth to an eco-ethic and sensitize an ecological conscience. It must
295 provide guidance and direction for stewardship of the earth. A new commandment is required: "Thou shalt
296 not pollute the earth." This commandment must be understood in both an individual and a corporate sense.
297 Individually, it must mean that individuals take upon themselves the responsibility for the stewardship of
298 the earth. From the simple admonition not to litter to the more complicated decisions as to the purchase of
299 an automobile with its potential for pollution, people daily make dozens of decisions which affect the
300 environment. This ethic must recognize that freedom is not unlimited. Economic and political entities
301 enact sweeping policies that have deep repercussions. These actions may well place some limits on
302 individual freedom for the good of the whole. As conservative author George Will asks: "Do the rights of
303 man include driving a Buick?"¹⁵ In other words, individual rights are not infinite when the public welfare is
304 at stake.

305
306 We are part of an interdependent web of existence. That is the Seventh Principle of the Unitarian
307 Universalist Association Covenant, celebrating our integral connection with an earth over which we are not
308 lords, but in which we hold citizenship. The web metaphor recognizes, in the words of Sierra Club founder
309 John Muir, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the

310 universe." The web is a thing of beauty. It recognizes that life is a delicate blessing - tough only in that we
311 all contribute to its strength. The web sustains us and we help sustain the web - in the words of Chief
312 Seattle, "What we do to the web we do to ourselves."
313

314 ECO-JUSTICE AND THE EIGHTH DAY OF CREATION

315
316 Two millennia ago a group of rabbis came together to debate a single issue: should humanity have been
317 created or not? They debated and then took a surprising vote: No, by majority vote. We should not have
318 been created since we appear to be incorrigibly evil. But because we have been created, they added, let us
319 assiduously examine our ways, our lives, so that we won't self-destruct and destroy everything with us. Let
320 us engage relentlessly in *tikkun olam*: repairing or mending our world.
321

322 Eco-justice is both an ethical and a religious issue. A few years ago at a Moscow meeting of scientific,
323 religious and political leaders, the eminent astronomer Carl Sagan, speaking for 23 scientists, said that
324 "efforts to save the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred."
325

326 Eco-justice is the term used to describe an equitable and sustainable economic system which at the same
327 time protects the environment. This view is summed up by theologian Jurgen Moltmann, who calls for an
328 ethic of "class betrayal." Such betrayal requires the world's "haves" to be advocates, not for the prosperous,
329 for they can advocate for themselves and do. The role of people of faith is derived from the Biblical
330 prophets, from Amos through Jesus, to advocate for those who cannot do so for themselves, the casualties
331 of our system.
332

333 If people of faith are to exhibit more than righteous indignation and life-style modification, they will need
334 to avoid romanticizing the earth and the eco-justice movement. Romantic talk of the earth as Gaia - the
335 Greek goddess of earth - may well inspire spiritually, but it will not change one single environmental or
336 economic policy. They will need to be as gentle as doves, but as wise as serpents, and as persistent as crab
337 grass in the spring.
338

339 Essentially, ecological and environmental problems are more systemic than personal. Life-style changes
340 will be important spiritually, as people learn to live in harmony with the earth. But part of that life-style
341 change will be to become militant shepherds of being who realize the need for policy change throughout
342 society. And those policy changes may not always suit peoples' self-interest. The fate of the earth is in very
343 human hands.
344

345 In the words of E.F. Schumacher of *Small Is Beautiful* fame, who rejoiced in being called a crank, "I don't
346 mind at all. A crank is a low-cost, low-capital tool. It can be used on a small scale. It is non-violent. And it
347 makes revolutions." Our politics ought to be based, not on economic self-interest but on a common good
348 which may well fly in the face of our own class interests in the short run. In the long run the whole
349 community will benefit from the creation of a just community.
350

351 Human beings tend to believe that they are the apex of evolution – what God had in mind all this long time.
352 But as one zoologist wrote, "The direction of evolution . . . has not been oriented toward (us). (We were)
353 not planned. Nature chanced to discover (us) in her somewhat random search for better models."¹⁶
354

355 Rene Dubois sets the tone for an ecological and economic revolution when he said "Humanity is the only
356 part of the living world which emphasizes fitness in terms of the individual person as the significant
357 biological unit. The most impressive aspect of the law of the jungle is not ruthless competition and
358 destruction but rather interdependence and coexistence."
359

360 We cannot completely resolve these contentious issues – the tension between spirituality and ethics;
361 between our religious sense of the earth as sacred and our ethical weighing of its uses for human purposes.

362 We can only suggest earth is a mystery we try to reduce to ownership at our peril. In making the earth
363 merely a mine for our exploitation, we not only ravage and pollute our global home, but we lose that sense
364 of reverence toward creation which separates us from the beasts of the field and the birds of the air; which
365 enriches our brief sojourn on this earth so it means more than daily getting and spending.
366

367 A metaphor from the Boy Scouts is instructive here. Scouts are taught to leave their campsite in as good or
368 better condition than they found it. All their trash is to be properly disposed of. The campfire should be
369 safely extinguished. Kindling wood should be left for the next camper. Does this same ethic apply to
370 human beings inhabiting planet earth? Are we morally responsible for the campsite on which we spend our
371 short years of life? This is not an idle question. It is an issue increasingly raised as industrial development
372 clashes head-on with environmental limits. These are not inconsequential issues.
373

374 As one wit said: "We are living beyond our means and the Earth Bank is not federally insured."
375

376 We are citizens of the planet who have a responsibility to save its future. That task requires the expertise of
377 scientists who comprehend our eco-system and the compassion of religionists who experience the earth as
378 sacred. As one clergyperson put it: "We live in the shade of trees we did not plant; we drink from wells we
379 did not dig; we build on foundations we did not lay."¹⁷ They must be cherished, not only for this
380 generation, but for those who follow.
381

382 There is a modern parable in the story of Hiroyuki Kohno, a 44-year-old plant worker at the quake-
383 damaged Fukushima Daichii nuclear complex in Japan. Kohno and the so-called "Fukushima Fifty" risked
384 their lives to disable that plant with a minimum of radiation damage. "To be honest, no one wants to go,"
385 he said. "...I know that when I go this time, I will return with a body no longer capable of work at a nuclear
386 plant." In explaining why he risked his life for his nation, he said, "There's a Japanese expression: 'We eat
387 from the same bowl.' These are friends I shared pain and laughter with. That's why I'm going." "We all eat
388 from the same bowl."
389

390 If we think of earth's development and human evolution in mythical terms of the "seven days of creation,"
391 then we are compelled to consider what we will make of our global home – as the eighth day of creation.
392 We are compelled to urgency: As once scientist said, "I feel like the time to do something was yesterday."¹⁸
393 Humanity needs what William James called a "moral equivalent for war," a transcendent goal to take the
394 psychological place of war with its call to commitment and sacrifice. We need a concerted global effort to
395 save our battered and beleaguered earth. That will require a decline in our wasteful and extravagant life
396 styles - "be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth" can no longer be our motto. We must become
397 responsible stewards; we must befriend the earth, not subdue it. We must become born-again pantheists in
398 passionate love with the earth which is our one and only home.
399

¹ Sylvia Earle. Chautauqua Lecture, July 18, 2012.

² //w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si_en.pdf.

³ "Confronting climate change is our moral obligation," *The Hill*, April 27, 2016.

⁴ Justin Gillis. "Heat-Trapping Gas Passes Milestone, Raising Fears," *New York Times*, May 11, 2013.

⁵ Lynn White. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." *Science*, March 10, 1967.

⁶ Job 38:3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, White.

⁸ Max Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

⁹ Thomas Merton ??????

¹⁰ Ibid., 99.

¹¹ Ibid., 108.

¹² Norman Cousins. *Saturday Review of Literature*.

¹³ *Utne Reader*, 90. ??

¹⁴ *Psychology Today*, 1/70, p. 50.

¹⁵ Quoted in the *Rochester Times Union*, June 10, 1992.

¹⁶ Milton Hildebrand, "A Zoologist Looks at Religion," *The Unitarian Register*, January 1958.

¹⁷ Peter Raible.

¹⁸ Mark Pagani, Yale geochemist who studies climates of the past. *The New York Times*, May 11, 2013.