

Yale Address, School of Sacred Music, June, 2018

Slide 1 – What Happens When You Cut Too Many Trees [dogs]

How do We Hymn the Planet in the Anthropocene? [title slide]¹

My passion is Christian Social Ethics. Sacred music is a close second.

Music and love, who can tell the difference!

Your invitation lets me join these. I am grateful. The number of invitations from musicians and liturgists to ethicists you can count on one foot. Musicians suspect that ethicists are most likely curmudgeons. At least if an airplane seatmate asks what I do and I say “I’m a Christian social ethicist” “Oh,.... that’s interesting” is the response. The conversation drags on for five seconds, tops. I do the crossword.

Neglect is mutual, however. The papers at the Christian Ethics Annual Meeting that include music, liturgy, and ritual you can count on your other foot.

So I feel grateful and at home on the one hand, and, on the other, like one of the characters behind the big door in the movie *Men in Black*,

where agile aliens bound around and jabber and drink espresso and are glad to be there. I'm one of those aliens.

Here are our questions: Where are we? And what time is it?

Answering the first is easy. We are here, on a tiny rock in an infinite cosmos. Up close, it's a lovely marble. **[slide—pale blue dot plus larger pic of Earth]** That's where we are.

What time is it? is harder to answer. Science says, "the early Anthropocene." Our title, *How do We Hymn the Planet in the Anthropocene?*, is very klunky, however. Especially the word "Anthropocene." When you type it into your omniscient computer, that obnoxious red line pops up to say, "Look for a real word."

We *could* use something more biblical, such as "creation groaning." So "how do we hymn the planet as creation groans?"

Paul helps. In the Romans 8 text that gives rise to this gathering, groaning crosses three circles. In the first circle, creation itself groans in travail, like the moans of a mother-to-be in a long labor. In the second, the church groans with inexpressible sighs, longing for bodily resurrection and a new world. And in the third, "the most remarkable of

all, the Spirit [groans] within us in ways too deep for articulate speech.”² Not only are we groaning, at least not alone, and not only is the church groaning, but the Spirit itself groans when the world is so wrong that it renders us dumb. We find *no* words without red lines or empty white space. Yet just here, New Testament scholar N. T. Wright says that this groaning is a signal that we are actually taking up our responsibility, burden though it be and uncertain as it is. In anguished *prayer* we are *engaging* our worldly responsibility, even if we can’t come to articulate speech as creation groans in travail.³

But we’re sticking with the klunky word “Anthropocene.” Why? Because *science*, so under assault by the principalities and powers of this Trumpian age, says this emerging epoch is monumentally important, so important it deserves its own name.

That said, I recognize that science graphs send people into PowerPoint coma. So I’ll try another way—a love letter. Who doesn’t love a love letter? Here’s one to my grandson. Eduardo will introduce you to the Anthropocene. **[Slide - Eduardo and the Brooklyn Bridge, the three-year-old philosopher contemplating his future]**

² N. T. Wright, “Jesus is Coming—Plant a Tree!”, *The Green Bible*, Introduction, p. 75. Slightly modified.

³ Wright, “Jesus is Coming—Plant a Tree!”, *The Green Bible*, Introduction, p. 76.

Dear Eduardo,

This is a love letter. But not the usual. Of course Grandma Nyla and I, with your *abuela y abuelo* in Colombia, match dotting grandparents anywhere.

Our affection lacks nothing.

But this letter is unique because it's the first love letter consciously written by a grandparent who lived in one geological epoch to a grandchild living in another. No other letter in the whole history of love knowingly sends love from a grandpa in the late Holocene to a toddler in the early Anthropocene! That's weird. It's also important because the Anthropocene is the time of your life while the Holocene is the time of mine.

This language rings strange to me. Yet probably not to you if you are reading this as a 16 or 18-year-old. Unlike me, you will experience the tumultuous changes that ride astride a new geological epoch. While human history and human experience was my main subject, Earth science and planetary experience will likely be yours. You will learn “Big History,” where the human drama is a chapter in Earth's drama, even a chapter in the “journey of the universe.” So you already know from school and your smart phone watch that Holocene means “the wholly recent” epoch—mine—while Anthropocene—yours—means “the age of the human.” That's from the

Greek, *anthropos*. God only knows why geologists all speak Greek, but they do.

I realize it's hopelessly nerdy to include a graph. What love letter features a science graph! **[Holocene graph]**

Follow the purple line. That's the temperature variation across the last 11,000 years. The last 11,000 years is the late Holocene. The temperature varies from less than 1 degree C. above the baseline to less than 1 degree below it. This minimal difference is rare in Earth's history (look at the line before it turns purple). The steady line means that the geological grammar of the epoch that has hosted every single human civilization to date, bar none, is climate stability, uncommon stability permitting and generating a riot of life.

My lifetime and Grandma Nyla's fall to the far right of this 11,000 year line, where the purple takes a sudden turn and heads straight up, with more to come. That temperature spike is the early Anthropocene and it's where I leave my life behind and you begin yours. You cannot know what I would give so that you did not live out your days on that trajectory. That line—your life—is climate *instability*, mass uncertainty, and breath-taking extinction across the community of life. Tragedy looms on that line, and I

hope you can somehow wring adaptation from distress. What I know is that Anthropocene citizens who continue Holocene habits doom their children.

Still, the world has not stopped being beautiful. So claim the beauty that is, Eduardo; beauty is its own resistance. Nor has love has stopped being love; “[e]ven a wounded world holds us.”⁴ In any event you and I have precious days together in the great transition that will define every day of your life and the last ones of mine, the transition from industrial to ecological civilization. However many years that takes—but surely your lifetime—may well turn out to be the “branching point between calamity and wisdom.”⁵ For it to be wisdom rather than calamity, we will all need to learn how to “let go of [this fossil-fueled consumerist] world and love all the things climate cannot change.”⁶

Did you know that the year you were born—2015—was the decisive one? In several ways.

It was the warmest on record to that point. In the U.S., in the first days of December alone, 1,426 high-temperature records fell, when you were ten months. That was hardly a shocker since the year before, 2014, was the

⁴ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (need to find p. no.)

⁵ David Grinspoon, *Earth in Human Hands: Shaping Our Planet's Future* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), xx.

⁶ The title of the documentary by Josh Fox, words added.

hottest until then and the hottest 17 years all occurred in the preceding 20. In May, when you were but three months, CO₂ passed the 400 parts per million mark for the first time in all human history. And half the climb to 400 ppm happened after 1980, in only half my lifetime. The present 411 ppm is not only the highest carbon concentration in 800,000 years, but the *rate* is increasing. Thus did also the rate of Antarctic ice loss triple since 2007. Since somewhere between 60 – 90% of the world's fresh water is frozen in Antarctica, dramatic sea level rise is now baked in.

Your birth year saw unprecedented response as well. On December 12, 195 nations signed the Paris Climate Agreement—a political miracle even when everyone there knew it was only the first step and, in order to stave off runaway catastrophe, greenhouse gas emissions must drop to zero by 2050, when you are thirty-five. One nation, under Trump, rather than under God, is exiting the Paris Agreement, just as all the dour records of your birth year were being broken in your second year and will be again in your third. As I write, it's monster storms—Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria, and José—and wildfires in both northern and southern California. In Barrow, Alaska, the climate monitoring station dropped off the map. Its algorithms found the warming data so unreal, they simply wiped it out, cleaned the slate. The algorithms had no place for a new normal that far out

of range. I suspect our Holocene ways are similarly tuned. Our habits in effect clean the slate and we carry on as before. We look at climate system change, then we look away.

Another 2015 response came earlier, in June—the papal encyclical, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*. I’ll not exegete it, only say that it is the single most powerful indictment to date of the modern world gone wrong. Moreover, it challenges what the Paris Agreement still enshrines—namely, the orthodoxy of perpetual economic growth within the framework of global corporate capitalism. The encyclical speaks of climate change impacts as “catastrophe” and “disaster,” while the Paris accord uses the tepid language of “adverse effects,” never acknowledging anything truly, fundamentally wrong with our dominant paradigms.⁷ And the Pope dares to say what Paris does not, that the happiness of the rich is subsidized by the suffering of the poor and of Earth together. Happiness comes with the debt that privilege exacts day-by-day from womb to tomb.⁸

The third turning point all but mentioned you by name. It was the filing of *Juliana et al v. United States*. Twenty-one children and young

⁷ From the discussion in Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate change and the Unthinkable* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 153-59.

⁸ With gratitude to Katilau Mbindyo and her written work for the Climate Ethics class, Union Theological Seminary, New York City, Spring Semester, 2018.

adults, backed by Our Children’s Trust, brought suit against the U. S. government. The children’s suit argues that the government holds resources such as land and water in trust for its citizens and should be considered a trustee of the atmosphere as well.⁹ How this quest for genuine intergenerational rights turns out you will know.

However it turns out, I’m clear about yet another development, a certain emerging consciousness. In these latter days of the Holocene we have become “aware of ourselves as short-lived creatures on a small planet in a long-lived galaxy of evolving stars and countless planets.”¹⁰ This cosmology of wonder and the journey of the universe is not only sound science; it’s your identity and mine. Short-lived though we be, our origins are stellar. Eduardo, we are stardust. The calcium in your teeth, the iron in your blood, and the gold of a wedding band of commitment you might someday wear, are all gifts of exploding supernovae. The grace of star death funded your life. It really does take a universe to raise a child—you, the little brother you tell me is swimming in your mommy’s tummy, and all your

⁹ From pp. 3 – 4 of the online article by Neela Banerjee, “Appeals Court Takes Up Youth Climate change Lawsuit Against Trump,” accessed Nov. 20, 2017 at <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/17112017/climate-change-lawsuit>.

¹⁰ Grinspoon, *Earth in Human Hands*, 462.

friends, ancestors, pet turtles, and progeny. So maybe the Crow nation is right. “We love the stars,” they sing, “and the stars love us back.”¹¹

What I most want for you and your baby brother is that you lose yourselves in the “kaleidoscope of creation”¹² Let yourselves be overwhelmed—by wonder. Not in order to escape the world, but better to inhabit it. I’ve loved watching you plant tiny carrot seeds in the little seedling pots, then seeing your delight in the first green pushing through as you carry the seedling so carefully to the raised bed on the deck and plant it there. A carrot grows in Brooklyn. [slide]

Yet to date this cosmic wonder is without translation into law or even conventional consciousness.

My prayer is that the children’s lawsuit, together with the papal encyclical, might join the cosmology of wonder and the intergenerational ethic it reaches for.

I finish on a related note. As a Christian ethicist, I ground obligation in a moral universe of *all* the children. “All the children” alludes to the dedication in Thomas Berry’s *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*.

To the children

¹¹ As passed along by John Grim in the Climate Ethics class at Yale Divinity School, Spring Semester, 2018.

¹² From the Chrysavvgis reading in the Hart volume.

To all the children
To the children who swim beneath
The waves of the sea, to those who live in
The soil of the Earth, to the children of the flowers
In the meadows and the trees in the forest, to
All the children who roam over the land
And the winged ones who fly with the winds,
To the human children too, that all the children
May go together in the future in the full
Diversity of their...communities.¹³

“All the children” translates as full-bore rights of nature, ourselves included. Its moral universe understands planetary creation as sacred, seamless and interdependent, a single, complex, luminous ecosphere. Like Genesis, this creation is also deemed “good.” *All* the children are worthy of the public trust the children’s lawsuit seeks. And since no other species has lawyers it must be *our* law for *everyone’s* sake—*all* the children’s.

[slide of Ed with Margarite]

¹³ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), n.p.

My dear child, I must break off for now. I do so with a heavy heart because I know that, wholly against Grandma Nyla's and my will, we hand you a bitter irony. Measured by our planetary imprint, the world we hand you is the most *human* of all epochs. It is also the most dangerous. And, with no choice whatsoever on your part, you will have to live with that. Grandma Nyla and I and our ancestors lived our whole lives by a single fatal premise; namely, "that what was good for us would be good for the world." But we were wrong. The contrary assumption was right, "that what was good for the world would be good for us."¹⁴ We learned too late that *because* human well-being is *always* derivative, creation's well-being is always primary.¹⁵ (Salish wisdom has it right: "We are as alive as Earth is alive.")

Next time I will write about the dilemma of the Anrhopocene, and more joyful things, too! But for now I must sign off.

I send all my love; Grandma Nyla's, too. Te amo.

Grandpa

P.S. I have a request. If, by the time you read this as a young man I am dead, as dead I well may be, would you join your mother's lovely voice at my memorial service? And would you sing not just any song; rather, this

¹⁴ Get Wendell Berry quotation and page from *The Long-Legged House*.

¹⁵ A slight adaptation of Thomas Berry.

one, where your living and my dying meet in a love that bridges even geological epochs.

Pues si vivimos, para Dios vivimos

Y si morimos, para Dios morimos.

Sea que vivamos o que muramos,

Somos del buen Dios, somos del buen Dios.

In all our living, we belong to God;

and in our dying, we are still with God;

So, whether living, or whether dying,

we belong to God; we belong to God.

[Slide with Ed at bridge]

[Slides – Sum of answer to What time is it? Plus two graphs of responsibility] This is the answer to the question, What time is it?

And here is the outcome for our collective responsibility. The first circle has a smaller circle within the larger circle that is the planet. The smaller circle shows the dimensions of human responsibility in most all societies since the Industrial Revolution (many indigenous nations exempted). This is a circle that assumes human society is the unit of human survival. It is not. The

planet is. Yet at this very same time the consequences of collective and cumulative human power extend far beyond human-to-human relationships and impact the entire planet. Differently said, we are not taking responsibility for what we actually do, in either space (the planet as a whole) or in time (future generations and the course of evolution itself). The second circle illustrates what responsibility in the Anthropocene must encompass—the entire ecosphere, the whole community of life and its abiotic envelope. But we have not accepted that in the way we live, not in the systems by which we order our lives nor in the habits of heart and mind.

.....

Earth tips, spins and changes, the ages come and go. Across it all, creation, living and dying, belongs to God. But how do we now, in our anthropocene moment with our anthropocene powers, hymn the Earth? What Dr. King said about the Civil Rights struggle holds for climate injustice: this will be a long, and bitter, but beautiful, struggle for a new world.

What is our part? Consider five good works of healthy congregations. Healthy congregations lose themselves in wonder; they tell the stories; they layer the rituals; they resist and renew; and they enter the songs they sing.

Lose themselves in wonder. Here is Yolo Akili's letter.

Dear Universe,

Today I ask that you *help me remember magic*.

Look around you. You live on a giant rock that gloats in the sky.

Look above. The bright yellow star that shines in the sky makes life possible.

Now just consider: That star holds an entire group of rocks together in a circle. That cosmic circle is made of stardust and bits, from which we are composed and [to] which, when you perish, you will return.

So umwhat was that you were saying about not believing in magic? What were you saying about not believing in miracles?

Whatever your doubts, surely you must be mistaken. Because if you, my stardust friend, are possible than I am pretty sure whatever acts, great or small, you are attempting pale in comparison to the magic and miracles that it took to get you here in the first place.

*Universe, today I remember I am the magic needed to make it happen.*¹⁶ **[Slides from rainbow to San Diego church and children in Brooklyn)**

We are called to wonder; lose yourself in it. Any God-talk that does not include the full 13.8 billion year journey of the universe is a human conceit, a species idol.

Tell the stories. The Christian strategy has always been to gather the folks, break the bread, and tell the stories. So it's back to the scriptures, people, to see if we can be a different people than the scoundrels who brought on this fossil-fueled mess. Listen anew to the old stories. The answer to the question, How do you dislodge deeply held [errant] beliefs?, is "Change the story, or re-purpose it."

Two stories come in mind. Both assume we're exiling ourselves from the Holocene and entering upon an age that lacks a known human analogue. Both stories are biblical. Both are also provocations to imagination.

In 587 B.C.E. the Babylonian army broke through the walls of Jerusalem and hauled the prominent citizens into exile, leaving the city in

¹⁶ Yolo Akoli, *Dear Universe: Letters of Affirmation and Empowerment for All of Us* (New York: Michael Todd Books, 2013), p. 47. **[Future possibility: Maya Angelou's poem, *A Brave and Startling Truth*.]**

ruins, including the temple. It was a cultural, political, and religious catastrophe¹⁷ because all the marks of a national religious and civic identity were shattered, and the land of promise itself was gone. The prosperity many had come to regard as a birthright in Israel's heyday as a nation was destroyed, the Davidic kingship was toppled, and the center of faith itself, the temple, was leveled. Israel's way of life was called into question.¹⁸ The answer to their plaintive psalm, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Ps. 137:4), was that the people could not sing the Lord's song. Indeed, they hung up their harps and lyres. When human beings cannot make music, they are in deep depression and powerless beyond words. They can only groan. Into this despondency the exilic prophets came with a word of judgment and of hope. It was judgment in that Israel's catastrophe came of its own arrogance and injustice during its years of prosperity and greatness. It was hope in that God might yet have another word. If our God could create a world in the first place, could not this God re-create ours anew?

But what grabs attention is the *way* the people come to terms with the worst crisis to befall them, the *way* by which it becomes possible for them to

¹⁷ See Bruce Birch, *What does the Lord Require? The Old Testament Call to Social Witness* (Westminster, 1985), 83.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

pick up their harps and lyres and “sing the Lord’s song” again. The prophets call up the people’s identity as these root in their deepest memories, then recast the images there as images of hope and renewal. Isaiah speaks of “a new exodus” and “a new creation,” Jeremiah and Ezekiel announce “new covenants of the heart.” “Exodus,” “covenant,” “creation”—these are the old orienting images of Israel’s journey, repurposed for a people of God in a drastically changed landscape. “A new exodus” recalls the people-creating liberation from Egypt, “a new creation” calls up the very beginning of beginnings, “new covenants of the heart” go to Israel’s binding relationship with God, one another and the land. Through this imaginative re-forming of their identity, the people combat resignation and despair and they begin the task of creating new forms for their life together. (Synagogue itself happens in exile, the temple rituals, such as sabbath, are moved to the family table, and the rabbi, not the priest, becomes the leader. New institutions are born.)

I do not know what creation groaning in the Anthropocene holds. I do know that viable community identity doesn’t happen solely by sharing common geography, events, or even experience, such as a drought, hurricane, or rising sea. A further element is needed—a collective memory that augurs hope and fashions a common story *from* shared experience. In this case, surviving exile and beginning anew amidst it was made possible

by the newly dispossessed recasting their own stories. This was more than recalling their years of fatal national greatness and yearning for its return. It was remembering themselves as brickmakers and houseservants, slaves who knew they were the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, wanderers who had wandered before and made a way out of no way. In short, becoming a different people was not a sudden event, and never is. Neither was, nor is, surviving as a people. It means retelling, reimagining, repurposing, and reliving the stories.

The second story is equally dramatic. When Peter is asked three times if he knows this Jesus and says, “I don’t know the man,” he isn’t exactly lying. He doesn’t really know *this* Jesus. The Messiah Jesus he *knew* wouldn’t end, like so many other Jews, in shame on the Roman cross. Nor was Peter alone. Even *after* the women reported their amazement at an empty tomb, the disciples enroute to Emmaus say, “We had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel.” “We had hoped” . . . “we had so hoped.” Alas, our hope was dashed.

There were three shocks. That Rabbi Jesus was cruelly and shamefully put to death and was not the Messiah they left their nets for, was the first and worst. But it was *also* a shock that, in the power of the Spirit, he was yet a powerful living presence among them. The tomb was

empty. This God of Jesus, who freed enslaved people from Egypt and led exiles home from Babylon, this God was doing a new thing, again. The third shock was just as startling. These followers, those who didn't really know him, didn't really "get it," were themselves now new wineskins and new cloth and full of chutzpah for a new world. They, the plain, the common, even the wretched of the earth, were living the reign of God come among *them*, of all people. Their *world*, not just a paradigm or two, had shifted and now they themselves plotted resurrection.

So buck up, friends. Anthropocene living will be tough and will challenge our imaginations and energies to the max. But we have the stories. Tell them anew, live them anew, see where they take us.

Layer and expand the rituals. In their fine work, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of this World for Crucifixion and Empire*, Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker have a splendid description about what rituals do.

Rituals are the core of every community's life. They are like the bones of a body's skeleton, the framework that holds things into a shape, giving form to a community's values and relationships. Humans ritualize everything that matters: eating, sex, death, meeting strangers, resolving conflicts; they are our most significant forms of

communication, more powerful than words. To live in paradise requires us to create the kinds of rituals that teach us to love the world and each other. Rituals guide us through the storm-tossed seas of the world—its principalities and powers and its addictive demons. The familiarity, structure, and rhythm of rituals create a container that can hold the conflicts and tragedies that touch every life and every community. Rituals enable us to express and survive pain, anger, lamentation, and despair, while being held by others who know that the side of pain is healing, the other side of anger is forgiveness, the other side of lamentation is joy, and the other side of despair is wisdom. Sensually rich rituals, full of life, orient us to material and spiritual beauties, embedding us more deeply in love for the world and the many physical dimensions of paradise.¹⁹

What about rituals in the Anthropocene? Some will take on new or renewed dimensions: the sacramental waters of baptism vis a vis the hard realities of drought and deluge and sea-level rise. How do we, as dependent as ever on water as life, live the baptismal life in the face and flood of water woes, including its deadly absence? Or what about the Eucharist,

¹⁹ Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of this World for Crucifixion and Empire*, 418-19.

communion, and your foodshed? Where does our food come from, at what costs and benefits to what people and land? What about food deserts, nutrition and malnutrition, and obesity or famine in light of the welcome table's invitation to share food? How does sacramental food at the welcome table, there for all by the grace of God, face down the weal and woe of this new geological epoch and the needs of "all the children"?

We likely need some new rituals as well. One of the gravest challenges in a globalized, warming world is creating empathy across space and time, putting ourselves in the shoes of those we don't see, can't see, or won't live to see. How do we do that? Roman Krznaric, in "Empathy and Climate Change: Proposals for a Revolution in Human Relationships," suggests cross-generational "climate banquets." Get the faith communities to put together, block-party style, rows of tables up one side of the street and down the other. Maybe it's several blocks, a mile of tables. Then have the youth on one side of each table and the elders directly across. There's some music together but only as prelude to a thousand conversations—about the food, where it came from and where it will come from, about the weather, what it is and might be; about life lessons from the elders and what advice and wisdom the youth can, and cannot, or should not take with them for their lives; and about what the youth hope for, and fear, and seek to do, marching

for their lives in a warming world.²⁰ Then excuse the elders or ask them to line up behind the youth. All will be facing empty chairs. Ask them to imagine the empty chairs occupied by future generations, the natural world, and the poor. What will they say to these? What commitments will they make? What songs will they sing?

In a word, layer the rituals, and maybe create some new ones, for creation groaning.

[Healthy congregations] **Resist and Renew, Renew and Resist.**

First, “resist.” The fundamental loyalty of ancient Christians as a “people of God,” like Jews before and beside them as a “people of God,” was loyalty to a *faith* community and its culture as the locus of the moral life, rather than to a *civic* community (the empire). This created a lasting tension. For Jews it was a rejection of Pharaoh and an exodus into the wilderness to become a people. It was also the prophets when the people and their kings acted in a manner reminiscent of Pharaoh or other imperial nations. Resistance and renewal were defining dimensions of identity.

²⁰ Roman Krznaric, in “Empathy and Climate Change: Proposals for a Revolution in Human Relationships,” in Stefan Skrimshire, ed., *Future Ethics: Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imagination* (Continuum, 2010), 167. I have taken the liberty of adapting Krznaric’s suggestion to fit the initiative of faith communities.

For Christians confessing “Jesus is our Caesar” (Acts 17:8) and “Jesus is Lord,” is in defiance of Caesar as *dominus et deus* (Lord and God). (If you want to see what that looks like right now, go to the website, reclaimingjesus.org, and click on the video of that name. It’s confessing Jesus via a vis what happening in this nation at this very moment.)

This very first creed *created* rather than *resolved* moral issues. Take fighting in Caesar’s armies. For most males in the Roman Empire, that was not a gut-wrenching decision. For Christians it was. One outcome is that Christianity has always honored pacifism and advocated non-violence, even when, under different circumstances, it found morally acceptable ways to honor exceptions as well (thus “just war” and “just revolution” theory, self-defense, and tyrannicide).

The larger point is that faith-based resistance at the outset of the church’s life is formative and normative for what follows, just as exiting Egypt was the grand narrative for the Jews. Ongoing tension between civic loyalties, on the one hand, and faith loyalties, on the other, is never resolved once and for all. Choices always have to be made. Who is standing up to Trump and white supremacy and what forms should it take?

There is another essential reason for resistance. Every good theology and ethic has a strand of utopian DNA. Faith envisions a redeemed world, a

new heaven and new earth of crystalline waters and trees of life with fruit in every season and leaves for the healing of the nations. For Jesus, this is the kingdom come and God's will done on earth. So long as this dream of Eden reborn or the new Jerusalem come is not extinguished, resistance and renewal will stir the spirit to realize its possibilities. Resistance and renewal belong to the center, not periphery, of faithful discipleship.

What about renewal? We've already charted the most dramatic example. The early Christians, most of whom were Jewish, re-imagined and renewed their own faith as a messianic movement centered in the resurrected Jesus and the Spirit. Out of that renewal a new religion was born, Christianity. Another dramatic achievement is that of African slaves in this country. They re-imagined plantation Christianity and set themselves on a way the slave owners' Christianity never preached or lived. When black Christianity was suspected by slave owners, it was feared. Even reading the Bible, indeed learning to read at all, was prohibited.

I add a third example, attuned to newfound anthropocene powers. The stakes are no less that our understanding of God.

In an uncanny anticipation of the Anthropocene, Bonhoeffer says in 1945 that now human knowledge and power reach across all of earthly life (recall our summary slide following the letter to Eduardo). This

unprecedented knowledge and power throws everything back upon ourselves and our choices and inaugurates a new era of vastly expanded human responsibility (recall our graphs of responsibility) This strains our ethical concepts and asks for their theological foundations. Who is God now, Bonhoeffer asks. What do “creation, fall, reconciliation, repentance, faith, *vita nova*, last things,”²¹ mean now? Who is Jesus Christ for us today when “today” is another epoch and we wield anthropocene powers?

The God of this new moment will not be God as a working hypothesis, the God-of-the-gaps who explains what we don’t yet know. To do what humans do, science doesn’t need the explainer God, and neither do we. Nor will this be the rescuer God, God as *deus ex machinae*, the parental God who bails us out of jams we create. Not only can responsible persons get along quite well without these particular “Gods,” but turning to them in a time of greatly expanded human powers is a moral cop-out. The God-of-the-gaps and the rescuer God belong, Bonhoeffer says, to the religion of an earlier consciousness and era. It may well have been the consciousness of nineteen hundred years of Christianity, but as practiced now, that religion is dysfunctional and immoral; it pushes responsibility for our own day-by-day actions away. Answering the question, “Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today,”

²¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8: 502.

requires another course, one that will confront human power and knowledge so as to experience God in what we *do* know, rather than in what we don't, and in problems that *are* solved, rather than only when and where we are vexed. Moral accountability will address the sins of our *strengths and powers and everyday choices*, rather than our weaknesses only. If God and standing before God in the Anthropocene cannot be located at the heart *of* human power, accountability, accomplishment and failure, then God and morality are pushed to the margins of all that counts for the life of the world.

Bonhoeffer has already provided the contrast: “Before God and with God we live without God.” I.e., before the God of our come-of-age powers and with *this* God, we live without what he calls the God of religion—the rescuer God and the God-of-the-gaps. Now we live with the God who empowers humans to take full responsibility for their unprecedented powers. God does not win space in the Anthropocene by virtue of omnipotence and rescue, but by entering, in the way of Jesus, into suffering to bring life to the wounded and broken places, nature's included. Such is the exercise of our responsibility in a world where everything turns on human choice. Our theology and morality must be renewed with a view to collective, cumulative human powers altering natural systems and reverberating into deep time.

[Healthy congregations] **Sing the Songs and Enter Them.** Both Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Pope Francis render the biblical Songs of Songs differently. The biblical poem is paradise found, Eden reborn. But Christian's Song of Songs for the Pope and for Bonhoeffer is love for Earth *with its distress*, Earth with its misery and afflictions as well as its beauty, wonder, blessing and joy. Loving Earth includes the agony of creation groaning. As one of my Yale students put it: "We are water-boarding the Earth."²² Loving water-boarded Earth as the Christian's Song of Songs includes its cruciform passion.ⁱ

Marty Haugen's words, "Give us the courage to enter the song"²³ are apt words for that Song of Songs. But I close with a different story, complete with ritual, a people's identity and their courage to enter their song. In southern France during the Nazi occupation, the small village of Le Chambon gave refuge to hundreds of Jews and smuggled them by night across the border into Switzerland. Neighboring villages did *not* risk their lives for strangers desperate to escape the trains to the labor camps or death camps. So the question arises, Why did Le Chambon do so, especially since no

²² Emma McDonald, in her final paper for Climate Ethics.

²³ From Haugen's "Gather us in."

Jews were native to the village? Le Chambon did have extraordinary leadership in Pastor André and Magda Trocme. It's distinctiveness, however, was that it was a Huguenot community with a long history of suffering as a persecuted minority, a history kept alive in its music and the stories and shrines of the martyrs. The villagers knew full well what such identity meant when persecuted strangers sought saving help. The Chambonnais, by religious conviction nonviolent resisters of evil, recognized in the Jews a persecuted people of God in grave need, and they responded in a way they said they "had to," a way they said was simply "natural," though it was not "natural" in the neighboring countryside. "Hospitality to the alien and the stranger among us," they called it, in good biblical fashion.

I was at Vanderbilt University some little while after Bill Moyers interviewed Pierre Sauvage about Sauvage's documentary on Le Chambon. Sauvage was born in Le Chambon during the short time his Jewish parents were there before being safety by night in Switzerland, and he had gone back to Le Chambon to find out, in effect, how goodness happened there while evil reigned elsewhere else. I knew that one of the Vanderbilt faculty, Daniel Patte, was a French Huegenot so I asked Daniel whether perchance he had seen the Moyers interview. He had and I asked whether he had

known this story. “Yes,” he said, “I grew up in Le Chambon. I was a youngster in those years.” “What did you think of Sauvage’s account?” I wanted to know. “It was very good,” he replied. “Was there anything that was missing or should have been changed?” was my next question. “There was one thing that should have been included. Every year the village made a pilgrimage to the gravesites of the Huegenot martyrs. There we sang the songs of the martyrs. We knew them all, those songs. Well, the upshot is that when France began collaborating with the Nazis under Vichy, we could smell evil.” (Parenthetically I add that the documentary opens with the old folks singing those songs.)

Le Chambon hospitality saved 6000 Jews—6,000 of 6 million not saved. But it was memory, identity, music and their “courage to enter the song” that saved both Le Chambon’s Jews and Le Chambon itself.

.....

Dear Eduardo, I must dash off now to a conference at Yale. I know I promised you a letter about more joyful things for your life in the Anthropocene. Hold me to that. But for now, this: lose yourself in wonder, tell the stories, deepen the rituals, resist, renew and sing the songs and enter them. These are the sustaining graces that will bless you and keep you and

let God's face shine upon you amid your own and creation's groaning. Te
amo, Grandpa.

Larry Rasmussen, Santa Fe, 2018

ⁱ Sometimes the cruciform is literal. In the course of two-and-one-half centuries of slavery, 5500 African-Americans were lynched in the United States and an untold number of Native peoples killed or moved off their lands. See James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011).

Sing the Songs is a double reference with a double meaning. The first reference is to the little book of love poetryⁱ in the Hebrew Bible where two love stories are told as one. At the center of The Song of Songs is sensuous love between a young woman (“I am black and beautiful,” she says, 1:5a) and a young man (“With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste,” 2:3b). This is hot! The other love is every bit as real even if not declared. It’s the love of these lovers for the land and its life. (“The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land,” 2:12) The lovers in fact draw images from the land to call up one another’s charms and to extol their love for one another: “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields, and lodge in the villages; let us go out early to the vineyards, and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love” (7:10–12).

These loves are one. Life and creation are sacred and seamless here, as they are throughout the Hebrew Bible. Animals and birds, fruit and fauna, dew and sunshine—these holy mysteries of the world are the vessels of the lovers' adoration.

The second allusion is seems only a tweak on this. It's Dietrich Bonhoeffer's. The first part of his comment to the Song of Songs is not the new twist. "It is only through the depths of earth that the window of eternity opens itself up to us"—that's pure Hebrew Bible even if not a specific verse. So is his second part: "The earth remains our mother just as God remains our father, and only those who remain true to the mother are placed by her into the father's arms." The new twist is his next line: "Earth and its distress—that is the Christian's Song of Songs.ⁱ "Earth *and its distress*" [emphasis mine] is the Christian's Song of Songs. The Song of Songs is a biblical paean of sensuous love celebrating Earth and flesh as uninhibited, redeemed Eden.ⁱ No distress whatsoever mars sheer erotic blessing. Earth is pure desire and pleasure; it's paradise found. Yet Earth for Bonhoeffer is Earth with its afflictions, miseries and degradation as well as its beauty, wonder, blessings and joys. Loving Earth includes the agony of creation groaning; loving Earth includes the cruciform passion it knows too well.ⁱ

The most important letter of our own time, the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'*, puts it this way:

“[Our Sister Mother Earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.....This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (*Rom* 8:22). **[Omit here, save for later.]** We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. *Gen* 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.” (Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' on Care for our Common Home*, paragraph 2)

As one of my Yale students put it, in commenting to this passage: “We are water-boarding the Earth.”ⁱ

Yet the point for both Pope Francis and Bonhoeffer is that Earth is not a planet we live “on” in some *temporary* role acted on some *temporary* stage. Earth rather is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh and the only place in all the universe attuned to the kind of creature we are. And in the Anthropocene this one true abode is a diminished shell of its possibilities and beauty. Nonetheless, those true to Planet Home

will not shrink from their responsibility for her welfare, whatever hard sacrifice that asks in hard times of our own making. “Unlike believers in the redemption myths,” Bonhoeffer writes, “Christians do not have an ultimate escape route out of their earthly tasks and difficulties into eternity. Like Christ (‘My God...why have you forsaken me?’), they have to drink the cup of earthly life to the dregs.”ⁱ Earth *in its distress* is the Christian’s Song of Songs. The Song of Songs is the spirituals *and* the blues, sorrow songs *and* joy in the morning, lament *and* alleluia.

on the basis of the public trust doctrine of the U. S. Constitution.

[omit: doctrine based in the Fifth, Ninth and Tenth Amendments, and the Vesting, Posterity and Nobility Clauses of the U. S. Constitution.]

How all this turns out you will know. Right now it’s wholly uncertain; and when chaos rules, “Nothing ages faster than the future.”ⁱ Yet even amidst certain uncertainty, this lawsuit is the right means for bearing my generation’s obligation to yours and yours to your kids.

Let’s call this the quest for “intergenerational rights.”

But is one generation morally obligated to the next? Only if the children matter. Yet it is not that *they* matter to *us*. (“What has progeny done for me?” Robert Heilbroner once famously asked.)ⁱ It is that *we* matter to

them. With no choice whatsoever, every generation depends on those who have gone before, and on the Earth they bequeathed. But never have the stakes been so high as now, when we are a new geological force.

Anthropocene people living Holocene habits doom their children.

Intergenerational rights will take a giant step if *Juliana et al v. United States* prevails.

(The temperature was up 7.8 degrees in October and 6.9 degrees in November while the rate of sea ice melting was faster than any in the last 1,500 years).ⁱ