



SMALL STUDY IN
ECO-SPIRITUALITY

JUST AND PROPER USE

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About this book....

The Book of Common Prayer, in Form VI of the Prayers of the People, asks, "For the just and proper use of your creation; For the victims of hunger, fear, injustice and oppression." We can consider this in human terms only, but we are also called to respond to all of creation, especially when our mis-use of God's creation causes the most marginalized in our world to suffer for our lack of care.

St. Hildegarde of Bingen and St. Francis, early mother and father of what we term eco-spirituality, we are invited and inspired by their lives and examples to honor, as sacramental, our beautiful world.

Let us pray...

Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation: Give us wisdom and reverence so to use the resources of nature, that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

...from The Book of Common Prayer, Prayer for
The Conservation of Natural Resources

Why Meditate on Eco-Spirituality?

"Thomas Berry, a priest of the Passionist order and one of the leading voices in 'eco-spirituality', said: 'There is now a single issue before us: survival. Not merely physical survival, but survival in a world of fulfilment, survival in a living world, where the violets bloom in the springtime, where the stars shine down in all their mystery, survival in a world of meaning.'

Berry suggested that there is a spiritual dimension to our present ecological crisis. It has long been understood by indigenous peoples that our relationship to the Earth is spiritually as well as physically sustaining. For indigenous peoples this is often included in their way of life, and expressed through their rituals and prayers.

In our Western culture we may sense this spiritual nourishment in the beauty, peace, or sense of wonder that the natural world gives us. This belongs to the quality of life rarely valued by our solely economic images of progress.

"And yet we are sustained in ways we cannot easily measure. In the words of Satish Kumar: 'The contemporary environmental movement, in the main, follows the path of empirical science, rational thinking, data collection and external action. This is good as far as it goes but it doesn't go far enough. We need to include care of the soul as a part of care of the planet.'

We need to explore ways that businesses can serve humanity in its deepest sense, rather than creating a poverty of spirit as well as an ecological wasteland – develop an awareness that the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the energy we use are not just commodities to be consumed, but part of the living fabric of a sacred Earth. Then we are making a real relationship with our environment.

This deepening of awareness may seem idealistic and impractical, but only a few decades ago organic farming, which respects the well-being of the soil, was considered uneconomic and idealistic. Now it is recognised as both environmentally and economically sustainable.

The next step is to reconnect with a way of life that respects and includes the soul as well as the soil, and encourage values-based businesses that respect both the individual and the environment. If we understand the importance of these values, and how central they are to the world we will leave to our children and grandchildren, we will find new ways that business can support these very human needs, and create an economic model that is not solely concerned with "surface ecology" but is sustainable for our deeper selves and for the whole ecosystem. This is one of the greatest challenges."

Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee

[The Guardian Online](#)

With our study: To take the "next steps." To bring to current the ministries of St. Francis and St. Hildegard, examine how we are living now, where we stand, and how better we can honor "the just and proper use of creation" in our practices.

St. Francis

"Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of ecology because he granted animals, elements, and the earth subjectivity, respect, and mutuality. In his Canticle of the Creatures, Francis the mystic describes a participatory universe in which God loves and cares for us through Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brothers Wind and Air, Sister Water, Brother Fire, and 'through our sister, Mother Earth.' At the same time, God receives praise, honor, glory, and blessing through each of God's creations. On the mystical level, Francis could see the transformational power of Love's presence within all creation."

Richard Rohr,

from Center for Action and Contemplation.

Canticle of Brother Sun

Most high, all-powerful, all good, Lord

All praise is yours, all glory, all honor

And all blessing.

To you, alone, Most High, do they belong.

No mortal lips are worthy

To pronounce your name.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you
have made,

And first my lord Brother Sun,

Who brings the day; and light you give to us
through him.

How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendor!

Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Moon
and Stars;

In the heavens you have made them, bright

And precious and fair.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brothers
Wind and Air,

And fair and stormy, all the weather's moods,

By which you cherish all that you have made.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
Through whom you brighten up the night.

How beautiful is he, how merry! Full of power and
strength.

Canticle of Brother Sun, Continued

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth,
our Mother,

Who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces
Various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Winter, Jack, OFM.

Franciscan Media

Meditation

How do I/we participate with the spirit in a world that was created in love? Or, how can I/we?

Meditation

How is a love of creation transformative?

Meditation

Does any part of "Canticle of Brother Sun" resonate with you? Why? Or Why not?

Meditation

Where does care for the world and care for souls,
for your soul intersect?

Meditation

Do you consider earth stewardship a form of evangelism?

Meditation

Can -or how can- our capitalist society honor ecology? As Christians, what is our voice here? Where is our voice? What is and where is your voice in it?

Conclusion...

"I often wonder if the one thing we all share in common—our planet—could ultimately bring us all together. We stand on this same “sister, Mother Earth” and we look up at this same Brother Sun and Sister Moon. Could it be that the Mystery of God is already hidden and revealed here? I believe so. Naming the universal Christ helps us to recognize the inherent sacrality, holiness, goodness, and value of the whole material world. For those who see deeply, there is only One Reality; there is no distinction between sacred and profane. Humanity is becoming capable of a truly global spirituality which is desperately needed for the common good to be realized.

God has come to save us all by grace. No exceptions. The mystics have no trouble surrendering to such fullness. For Bonaventure, God is a “fountain fullness” of outflowing love, only flowing in one positive direction, always and forever. There is no wrath in God. There is only outpouring love."

from

Richard Rohr,

Center for Action and Contemplation.

Hildegard of Bingen

"Fire of the Holy Spirit,
life of the life of every creature,
holy are you in giving life to forms.
River spring forth from the waters
earth wears her green vigor."

—Hildegard of Bingen

"This "region of delight" was also critical to the great visionary and mystic Hildegard of Bingen, who spent decades investigating natural science, agriculture, herbal remedies, and the sacred spaces of the earth. I propose that Hildegard's intimate relationship with the natural world was a conduit for sacred revelations and that this relationship provided the very essence from which her ecstasies were shaped and formed.

In spite of these cultural concerns, Hildegard literally dug into the earth. Even her sleep was characterized by proximity to the land, as legends of her life claim that her particular anchorage was cut into a hillside. Living within and tending to the earth produced a heightened sensorial attunement to and a unique understanding of the other-than-human world.

Hildegard of Bingen, Continued

"This embodied experience of the interrelatedness of the whole of creation gave her insight into nature's immanent creativity and rhythms. Nature's creative forms, made evident through the biodiversity of Hildegard's medieval Germany, were capable of bringing forth a display of magnificence that endlessly provoked her wonder. Forested landscapes, pastures, moors, and countryside monasteries provided the environs for a multiplicity of meaning with wild places and animals, prompting Hildegard to develop a posture of openness and a desire to see the sacred within all of creation.

The garden and the whole of the great, green earth was understood to be the place where God's Spirit and our spirit meet to produce fecundity: holistic wellness for the person and a profound mutual relationship with the natural world.

Creation is not a scenic backdrop designed only so humans can take the stage. Creation is in fact a full participant in human transformation, as the outer world is absolutely needed to mirror the true inner world; the world itself is a sacrament.

Hildegard of Bingen, Continued

"Thomas Berry believes that 'our most urgent need at the present time is for a reorientation of the human venture toward an intimate experience of the world around us.' Berry and Hildegard were prophetic healers, voices calling us to our collective, numinous relationship with nature. The land models mutuality and sustainability, but to come to know these values, one must be in renewed communication with other species—an

occurrence inherent to inter-being in the natural world.

She embodied a mutual meant-for-ness, ... she became a channel: the imminent sacred and the transcendent communicated to and through her. We each have this potentiality. If we could recover her ancient ways and methods of communing with the divine through our local lands, perhaps we too could develop a stronger prophetic voice and political agency to confront the destructive forces operating in our world today.

Hildegard of Bingen, Continued

If we could return to our childhood responses to the natural world...we would recognize that our immediate response to any of these experiences is one that establishes deep contemplation, intimate connection to the land to which one belongs, and openness to Spirit."

Mary DeJong, from [The Seattle School Blog](#)

Meditation

The natural world served, for Hildegarde, "as a conduit for the sacred revelations." How could we consider the same in our 21st Century world?

Meditation

What voices are heard in our times that speak for our natural world? Are these political figures?

Meditation

Where do you stand in the "climate crisis" dialogue? Does what you read about Hildegard influence your thoughts?

Meditation

With Hildegard's inspiration, how could you increase your participation in the intersection between the sacred world and the natural world?

Meditation

If we choose to listen like Hildegard to the natural world, what would it tell us right now?

Meditation

As people of faith, what is our responsibility to those who live at the margins, for whom the climate crisis influences in their ability to grow food and have adequate water?

Meditation

Has the COVID-19 Pandemic changed the way you consider the health of our food, our food sources, and how the poor of our world eat? Has it changed how you view food? Separately, has the SIP changed your habits in any way to connect you more--or less--to the natural world? If so, how? And what was the outcome?

Blank pages...

A few empty pages for your ideas and sketches..

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