

A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming

Sallie McFague

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Preface

Sallie McFague makes very clear what many governments and individuals have been avoiding:

The shock of realizing that our high-energy consumer lifestyle is sending the earth into potential disaster is a wake-up call. We are approaching the tipping point in global temperature that will change the basic conditions for the flourishing of life.

Time is running out for us humans to do anything about it and contribute to saving our entire future, the earth on which we depend.

McFague does not pussy-foot around this alarming situation. Global warming is not just something happening “out there,” removed from us. We humans are responsible for it, especially we humans in highly industrialized countries like the USA. It is we who are destroying the earth-- our own habitat and that of all other forms of life.

McFague is a theologian. Her task is therefore quite different to, let's say, Al Gore's. It is to get us to rethink our woefully inadequate theology, specifically who we are and who we understand God to be. It is the shift from an individualistic whatever-works-for-me stance to a communitarian one of it-can-only-be-good-for-me-if-it-is-also-good-for-the-entire-rest-of-creation. Likewise McFague shows us how misguided we are to think of God as either some remote entity, aloof and above it all, or as only and supremely concerned personally about “me.” Instead she introduces us to a God whose being is reflected in all of creation, of which we are a tiny part. We are equally misguided to think we are somehow so special that we, from all creatures, will be plucked out of global warming's way and ushered into a blissful heavenly future where we can continue to live with impunity.

Why does all this matter? There is nothing wrong and in fact everything right with going green, saving whales, walking to work. Deeply engrained habits are incredibly hard to change. For centuries we have made earth our playground—and waste bin; we have been intent on being in right relationship to God—but haven't given too much thought to our relationship to our environment; and have espoused an essentially individualistic and therapeutic faith.

A New Climate for Theology will probably shake your beliefs to the core. Nothing less is the goal. For this is what is needed: a new understanding of who we are in relation to God and the world. Only with a

thoroughgoing new foundation for our beliefs can we live differently, making ourselves smaller in order to make room for others.

PART ONE: THE SCIENCE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THEOLOGY

Chapter 1. Climate Change: The Evidence and Consequences

Mitigating disastrous climate change must be our highest priority. This chapter summarizes the unequivocal scientific facts. It reminds us that we share a common fate with the rest of our planet. It challenges us to exchange our individualistic and entitled ideas of what constitutes the good life for one that is radically communitarian—a good life for all, not just a good life for me.

Key terms and concepts in this chapter:

Positive feedback

The good life

Communitarianism

Mitigation policies

Personal transformation & public regulation

Strategy for reading this chapter:

As you read this chapter, pay attention to how McFague gets us to think *theologically*. She wants us to respond not so much out of fear as out of a new understanding of our small place in God’s creation. For this gives us our sense of morality; it is this rather than fear that elicits our desire to live appropriately for the sake of the entire cosmos.

As you read, identify the ways in which she shows you who we are as humans.

Questions for reflection/ discussion:

- (1) There are still climate change deniers. This chapter calls us to overcome our denial about the fact and enormity of global warming.
 - What are some of the scientific facts of global warming?
 - Of which ones were you not aware?
 - As a group, in 20 words or fewer summarize the basic facts and consequences of global warming. E.g., “as a result of....climate change willunless....”
 - (2) McFague insists that the motivation to act to slow climate change requires two things: personal transformation and political/public regulation.
 - Brainstorm as many understandings of the human role on earth as possible. E.g., as civilizers, subduers, masters, stewards, caretakers, consumers, etc.
 - Which of these terms best fits how you understand your role on earth?
 - In an earth-positive sense, what for you would be a radically different notion of (y)our place on this planet?
 - McFague insists that “laws that will help us change the way we live” (p.26) are necessary to force us to change the destructive ways we live.
- List a few of the many arenas in which you live out your day.

- For one of these arenas, list some of the destructive ways you are living in it.
- Suggest a law that would force you to change your ways.
- What would be some of the consequences of that change for you, for your neighbor, for your immediate environment, for local and global planetary health?
- Change is hard. Talk about any resistance you feel. What would help you or force you to persevere with that change of habit?
- Suggest an earth-positive law that would force someone else to change their ways.. What hardships would it inflict on them? What might help them to persevere with that change nonetheless?

Translating key concepts into everyday experience:

1. The way we travel.
On pages 18-19, McFague talks about love miles and the moral issues of travel
 - Think back to your childhood. What was the longest annual trip you made?
 - If you could only keep one air trip a year, which one would it be? To a conference, to see family at Thanksgiving, to go on vacation, to attend a funeral or wedding..., a business trip?
 - If you *had* to use a greener form of transportation for each trip you made in the last 24 hours, what *could* you do?
 - What/who would be affected and how by your reduction in travel, by your foregoing particular trips?
2. Change and effects of change in travel.
 - Over the last 5 years, how have you already made changes in how, how frequently, and where you travel?
 - What is hardest to change? Why? How would you do it if you had to?
 - What would represent a major “green” change in how you work/go to work/conduct business (for example, finding alternatives to conferences, carpooling, moving house)?
 - What might the effects of your changes be on someone in Peru, Somalia, France, Canada, your neighboring state, your own family?

More Exercises/Research:

- List 6 past or present global “trouble spots”. E.g., Darfur, Guatemala, New Orleans, Chernobyl, the U.S. Depression-era Dust Bowl, Arctic melt etc.
 - Brainstorm together what you know about what lies at the root of the troubles. (Often there is a connection between changing ecosystems resources, lack of access to clean water, sufficient food, etc and violence and ill health.)
- How does that play out in your town/county/state?

Further resources:

The journal New Scientist at <http://environment/newscientist.com/channel/earth/climage-change>

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at <http://www.epa.gov/climatechange>

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change at <http://ipcc.ch> Browse around and also dip into the IPCC’s Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech of Dec 10, 2007. Look at the connections between climate change and world peace.

Also visit some sites of organizations or practices you know about only by reputation. For example:

www.greenpeace.org

www.foodandwaterwatch.org

www.clintonfoundation.org

www.oprahsangelnetwork.org

www.workersrights.org

Chapter 2. Global Warming: A Theological Problem

There are a few mantras or refrains running through this chapter:

- “We are not our own; we belong to the earth”
- “*The time is now*: there is no more time for either denial or delay.”
- “We are no longer God’s darlings, but caretakers of God’s household.”

With this in mind, McFague urges us to “change our view of ourselves—our anthropology—so that we will elect leaders who can help structure our society in ways that are good not just from some privileged human beings, but for all human beings and all other life-forms. This is what global warming is telling us: we cannot continue to live as selfish individuals, heedless of the consequences of our profligate, adolescent behavior.” (29-30).

Specifically, McFague urges us to adopt a communitarian view of ourselves, a perspective in which our well-being is interdependent with the well-being of all other life-forms.

To do this, we need a new understanding of salvation, one that understands it as the well-being or flourishing of all.

Key terms and concepts in this chapter:

Theology

Anthropology; anthropocentric

Cosmological theology

Incarnational theology (34)

Ecological catholicity (34-5)

Cruciform living (34)

Ecological economics (37)

Strategy for reading this chapter:

Christian theology has been anthropocentric, centered on humans. Instead of continuing to care mainly about human well-being, McFague suggests we adopt a cosmological theology—one that has the cosmos at its center.

Without the earth at the center of our theology, the way we think about God, ourselves, and life has tended to become divorced from materiality and focused almost exclusively on the spiritual. When “God is in his heaven,” in fact all is not right with the world.

Most of our rituals and speech around death and dying suggest that the body is dispensable, even troublesome, and our spirit or soul floats on to heaven. Our daily spiritual practices focus more on beliefs and words than on participating in life with our whole bodies.

Yet biblical theology is actually quite different to this. It shows a world heavily interrelated, a God who became incarnate—enfleshed (notice: not inspirited)—and walked among us. It depicts a God who finds goodness in creating the world order—all very physical stuff like water and land, birds and animals.

Because salvation is a matter of public and planetary flourishing (36), McFague proposes a new understanding of salvation, one that is not solely focused on humans, one that is not private or personal, but embraces the well-being of the entire planet.

Look for these themes of a cosmological theology, of body, and of salvation as global well-being as you read the chapter.

Questions for reflection/ discussion:

McFague's new understanding of salvation as public and planetary flourishing stands on its head our anthropocentric theology. Religion cannot be private and human-centered; the church cannot afford to exclude the world and specifically the earth from how it understands its relationship to God. McFague in fact goes so far as to say that living in solidarity with others is the *only* way to life (39).

- If such an understanding of salvation is something new for you, describe how you responded to reading her suggestion. Suggest why perhaps you felt this way.
- Can you think of anything Jesus specifically said about living in solidarity with the oppressed and those of whom others took advantage? How did he put this into action? In the biblical accounts, how does he challenge us to do it?

It is rather shocking, isn't it, to be told *we* are the enemy as far as climate change is concerned (28)?

- In one minute, come up with as many ways as you can that we humans contribute to climate change.

Think theologically:

- What might salvation mean for you? The farmer who picks your coffee and the tree that bears it? Your city's water supply? Your back yard or local park?
- What does living in solidarity look like in each of these instances? (39)
- McFague suggests that there are three contexts for doing theology: the cosmological, the political, and the psychological. Give examples of what you think she means.

Translating key concepts into everyday experiences:

As an exercise, call or talk to a handful of people in the next week. Try to pick people of different ages and backgrounds to spice things up.

- First, without elaboration, simply ask each person what he or she understands by the term "salvation."
- Second, ask what their dream is for the world.
- Third, ask them whether and in what ways personal salvation and the salvation of the world are connected.

If you prefer to do an exercise now, in the group, then express what you understood salvation to be as a teenager, and how you understand it now. What changed?

Further resources:

Google “salvation and world religions” to see how differently salvation is understood throughout the world.

PART TWO: EXPLORING GOD AND THE WORLD WITHIN CLIMATE CHANGE

Chapter 3. What Are We? Ecological Anthropology

Here, McFague gives us a primer in ecological anthropology—or who we think we are in relation to the rest of the world. Rather than being God’s darlings, we come to see ourselves as God’s partners working for a just and sustainable planet. We see that our assumptions about our place in the universe determine how we act.

Key terms and concepts in this chapter:

Ecological anthropology
Ecology (48)
Cosmocentrism (48)
Egocentrism (50)
House rules (50, 53-4, 56)
Producers, consumers, decomposers (54-55)

Strategy for reading this chapter:

We will not really live differently (more justly and sustainably) until we think of ourselves differently—which climate change prompts us to do. As you read this chapter, note how our understanding of our place in the universe has changed. Who really owns or belongs to what?

Questions for reflection/discussion:

- We need a paradigm shift in who we think we are, and in how we live. For McFague, what is at the root of this shift?
- McFague says we inhabit three main societal spheres that define us: the religious, the economic, and the governmental or political. What or who does each of these spheres say we humans are? What does each sphere suggest are a) our rights, and b) our duties?
- McFague classifies all of five into three categories: producers, consumers, and decomposers. Make a table: list some ways in which a) humans, b) trees, and c) birds are producers, consumers, and decomposers. What strikes you?
- What does the Big Bang tell us humans about our relation to what is non-human? What is the key way in which humans are different than everything else, and what does that entail?

Translating key concepts into everyday experience:

- McFague suggests (50) that we humans are not only dispensable but that in fact “we are at present the planet’s most dangerous force [and] all other species would be better off without us.” Suggest some ways this is true and some ways you think it is not.

- Most of us have a creation story. What is yours? If there are ways in which it is not adequate to the task of addressing climate change, what are they?
- “All we do is consume” (55). How did you respond on first reading this? On coming back to it now? What does it prompt in you?

More Exercises/Research:

- We are encouraged here to think of ourselves inhabiting the world not as we do a hotel but a home. Instead of a “use and discard” mentality (53), what three house rules does the author suggest to express our appreciation and care for each other and our world?
- How are you already beginning to see yourself as a dependent being?
- How are you dispensable? Why do we pretend otherwise?
- What are your household’s “house rules”?
- List some ways in which you show appreciation and care (or lack of these) toward the earth.

Further resources:

Google “creation myths” and read a few. What strikes you about how these myths differ from the one(s) you grew up knowing and believing? Are there ones that inform your understanding of how to do something about climate change?

Chapter 4. Who Is God? Creation and Providence

The creation story most of us have imbibed is one that emphasizes God's power, transcendence, and distance from the world. Yet McFague suggests that an appropriate metaphor might be to think of the world as God's body, in other words, the world as the incarnation of God. If God is "with us" in such a thoroughgoing way, rather than sitting on a throne in the distant clouds or something like that, we share a world and a destiny, and what we do and allow to happen to our shared world is most definitely our concern as well as God's

Key terms and concepts in this chapter:

Creation

Providence

Models of God

Questions for reflection/ discussion:

- McFague suggests (62) that it is more pertinent to ask how we should live than why are we here. Why?
- Briefly describe the characteristics of the traditional creation myth. What is God's relationship to this world? What is ours? (64-5) If our human task were "to care for the garden" (66), how would you change your life's focus?
- How does the Deistic Model (66ff) understand God and the world?
- How does the Dialogic Model (67ff) understand God and the world?
- How does the Monarchical Model (69ff) understand God and the world?
- How does the Agential Model (70-71) understand God and the world?

McFague proposes an alternative: the world as God's body (71-2).

- What does this model reflect about God and the world that the other four models do not? In what ways do you find it unsatisfactory?

Translating key concepts into everyday experiences:

Look again at the five models of God and the world.

- See if you can match a particular model to a particular worldview in the US or elsewhere. What are the effects of such a worldview with regard to climate change?

McFague suggests that the implications of the model of the world as God's body are:

"We must know the world and where we fit into it,"

"We must acknowledge God as the source of all life, love, truth, and goodness,"

"We must realize that while God is in charge of the world, so are we" (74).

- Give practical examples of what this formulation means to you, e.g., how it affects your being religious, your understanding of your place in the world, your understanding of your power to do good and "evil."

- If as McFague suggests (79ff) Christianity is creation- rather than redemption-oriented, does that change how you respond to climate change? To God? To other people's needs?
- In what ways does your neighborhood/ campus/ household/ faith community encourage you to make lifestyle changes personally and publicly to mitigate climate change?

More exercises or research:

- Hymns depict many different understandings of who God is and who we are. What do hymns you are familiar with convey about God? Is God omnipotent, transcendent, a friend, a judge of wickedness, a restorer of justice? W. Paul Jones in his book of the same title talks about these as depicting different *Theological Worlds*. In a follow-up book, he demonstrates how the fact that each of us tends to gravitate to one of these understandings of God means there are typically several *Worlds Within a Congregation*. He offers an extensive quiz or inventory you can do to determine your theological world. This is helpful to understand why we clash about the importance we ascribe to particular things, like keeping rules, confessing sin, and how we worship.
- If you have access to outdoors, identify one square foot of ground (e.g., grass, under a tree, part of your garden, the side of a path) and if possible mark it off in some way. Sit down and study this small patch of ground. What do you notice? Look very carefully. Spend some time. Go back once a day/a week and notice any changes (e.g., growth, moistness, dryness, insects, footprints etc).
- Find a volume of poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins and read *God's Grandeur*, *The Binsey Poplars*, *The Windhover*.

Chapter 5. How Shall We Live? Christianity and Planetary Economics

For us humans to live, we actually have no choice but to follow the household rules of taking only our share, cleaning up after ourselves, and keeping the house in good repair for future occupants. We are integrally related to our planet's health. The planet can manage without us, but we cannot manage without the planet's flourishing.

The problem we are facing is not just the loss of non-renewable resources (such as coal and oil) but also the loss of renewable resources (such as particular species or trees in a particular location). This is caused by negative synergy (91). When one part of the ecosystem is not thriving, it eventuates in a loss of "services" (90) in several parts.

This is the opposite of the kingdom of God, which is "known by radical equality at the level of bodily needs" (92). How our society is organized is shown by how the neediest bodies are treated. How we treat the neediest among us is a mark of how we understand the kingdom. Is it only for the select few, or is it radically egalitarian and for all?

Key terms and concepts in this chapter:

Ecosystem services (90)
Synergism (90)
Market economics
Ecological economics
Planetary services (90)
Negative synergy (90-91)
The kingdom of God (92ff)

Strategy for reading this chapter:

Throughout the chapter, notice that, since humans are dispensable, if humans are to flourish, then nature has to flourish too. Addiction to our consumer lifestyle is the opposite of this.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- Economics is "an ideology with an assumed anthropology and a goal for the planet" (84). Yet there is a huge difference between our prevalent model of market economics and the ecological economics McFague proposes on behalf of the planet. What is the underlying difference?
- Religion, government, and economics determine and validate our behaviors. Presumably if we can get each of these three to reflect a communitarian ethic of justice and sustainability, it would be easier for us all to "do the right thing." For now, the prevalent model of economics is the neoclassical one (86). What are its main characteristics? What are its values? What are its assumptions about people, specifically about need and greed? (88)
- How does ecological economics view need/ greed, community/the individual? What are its basic values (88-89)?

- The planet can be seen as being more like a machine or more like an organism (90). What happens to a machine, and what happens to an organism when one part stops functioning properly?
- There are Christian proponents of each of these economic models. Suggest how they defend their convictions.
- The issue with any economic model is who gets to eat, or put even more crassly, who lives and who dies (93). It's about distribution of resources. At the moment, our environment is showing the results of our decision that our air, water, soil, animals, certain humans, etc. are less important than some humans are. Jesus proposed a completely different kind of economics, something we know as the kingdom of God. How did he speak about this new reality? Is it realistic? What would your opponents say?
- McFague suggests a somewhat unusual definition of sin on page 94. In what ways does this ring true with what you already know and believe? In what ways will you need to "regroup" to take this new understanding on board?
- The author suggests four steps we Christians can take to dislodge the dominant neoclassical economic paradigm (94-96). What are they? Give an example of how you might enact each. What kind of theology and anthropology are inherent in such an ecological economics?
- In the chapter's final paragraph, the author says that "a just and sustainable planet is the great work of the twenty-first century to which all religions—indeed, all areas of human endeavor—are called. a) Why is it particularly the task of religions to advocate and work for this? b) Having come this far in the book, to what other areas of "human endeavor" do you think the author is referring?

Translating key concepts into everyday experience:

- If economics is a matter of justice, of sharing resources among those who need them, how do you show this by how you distribute your own income—in your household, in your neighborhood, through your shopping, in the world?
- Specifically, what makes it hard for you to opt out of market economics and into ecological economics?

More Exercises/Research

- Find out how to calculate your carbon footprint.
- In recent years, honey bees have been plagued worldwide with diseases that have decimated their numbers. What effect has this had on other parts of the planet? Another way of asking this is: why then is a creature as small as a bee so important to the web of life?
- Early on in this chapter we read about two very different economic worldviews—the neoclassical and the ecological. In what ways does your institution buy into each model?

PART THREE: SERVING GOD AND LIVING IN THE CITY WITHIN CLIMATE CHANGE

**Chapter 6. Why We Worship:
Praise and Compassion as Intimations of Transcendence**

Religion is about doing something, rather than believing in something. This “doing” is mainly in the form of gratitude to God and compassion toward others (102) and both of these are acts of transcendence. Ecological economics is likewise an implementation of transcendence in that it looks to the good and survival of the whole/all, not simply of the select few, just as God is concerned with all, not just the select few.

Key terms and concepts in this chapter:

Metaphor, symbol, analogy
Theology as metaphor (109)
Back side theology (113)
Kenosis or self-emptying (117)

Strategy for reading this chapter:

We use an array of metaphors to talk about God. McFague proposes talking about the world as God’s body—not of course in the literal sense of arms, legs, and organs, but to make immediate and maybe even startling God’s involvement in and care for the world. It is an intimate, enfleshed relationship, not a remote and uncaring one. It is because of this intimacy and dependence that she proposes a creation theology heavy on praise and compassion rather than a redemption theology heavy on sin and divorce from the world.

This metaphor of the world as God’s body McFague calls an “in-between strategy” (107). By using a familiar image (body), but putting it into a startling context (world as God’s body), we open ourselves to new possibilities, new ways of understanding God and ourselves.

Questions for reflection/ Discussion:

- In what ways are gratitude and compassion acts? How are they acts of transcendence? And what do they have to do with earth, the body of God? (104-5). What do you think McFague means on page 112 when she talks about gratitude and compassion as having or showing the ability “to look but not devour, not possess”? How is this different than our more common behavior?
- With the metaphor of the world as God’s body in mind, how then can you live in the world “*as if it were the body of God*”? (113).
- McFague asks us to imagine God “as being the matrix of all that is” (114). How might you do that in your context as you read this?
- Loving God then becomes “feeding the suffering body of the world” (115). Look at the various examples the author gives of how to do this. What are new ideas for you? In the course of reading this book, how has your understanding changed of what it means to love God?

- Another way of loving God is by disappearing as a separate individual, as John Woolman learned (116). In relation to climate change, what might this mean practically for you (as an individual, society, nation)?
- Such dispossession is also called *kenosis* (read Philippians 2:1-8) or self-emptying, and was epitomized by Jesus on the cross. How can you self-empty, or create space for others? In your “group,” how would it be particularly difficult to “decrease, retreat, and sacrifice so that others may be”? (117). In other words, what do you find particularly difficult to give up or share?
- McFague suggests (119) that making room for others is a kind of transcendence. Explain what she means by this.

More Exercises/Research:

- What is the poorest (or neediest) you have ever been? At that point in your life, what did you most want from others? Were you able to ask for it? Did you receive it? (93)
- What is your vision of the “good life”? (95)
- What are some concrete ways in which you can advocate for the ecological economic model in your part of the world? (95)
- How has the discussion on ecological economics started to push you to reconstruct your theology—specifically how you understand God, humans, and their relationship? How you think of body/spirit, the earth/ spiritual matters?

Further Resources:

As a way of recognizing and valuing otherness, and of meeting God in ordinary things, read Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poems *Pied Beauty* (Glory be to God for dappled things) and “As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame,” also available on the Web.

Chapter 7. Where We Live: Urban Ecotheology

Although nature itself is no longer natural or pristine, at the same time we are reminded that absolutely everything is made from nature--even the urban environments in which most of us live. "Nature is not just the trees and parks in cities; it also supplies the energy that builds every road, house, school, and store in cities. And if most of us live in cities, should not our attention be directed particularly to that space that is so under threat from climate change? And since everyone "in the world depends on nature and ecosystem services to provide the conditions for a decent, healthy, and secure life" (127), how can we ensure the just distribution and sustenance of that nature?

Key terms and concepts in this chapter:

Services of nature (127)

Kenosis (136)

Strategy for reading this chapter:

McFague recommends "thinking differently" as the underlying way we can begin to affect climate change positively. She suggests that religions in particular "are in the business of forming the imagination and thus influencing the actions of people." As you read this chapter, reflect on how your religion has formed your imagination with respect to the environment. How has this book re-formed that understanding?

One theological way of thinking differently and limiting oneself is by *kenosis* (136-7). Attend to the ways in which kenosis offers an alternative way of being in this chapter.

Questions for reflection/discussion:

If the "objective recognition that others exist, have intrinsic worth, and have rights to the basics of existence" = LOVE (133), how do you express your love to your neighbors? Those on the other side of the world?

Read McFague's depiction of the city of Vancouver. How has Vancouver constrained its "second nature"? How has it failed to do so sufficiently? What consequences of this can you imagine for the city?

Translating key concepts into everyday experiences:

- Take one item (such as an article of clothing you have on, a Granola bar you have in your pocket, or an ipod in your jacket) and trace all of its components back to their "first nature." Also, find out how all those separate components were sourced, how they were transported to the various places they were manufactured, and then sold. In other words, try to find out as much as you can about how that one thing came into existence in its present form, and into your possession.
- In situations of extreme deprivation (such as concentration camps) often some individuals deprive themselves or limit themselves (kenosis) in order to benefit others who perhaps need resources (like food) more, whether for physical or psychological reasons of survival. How have

you done that in your household or in the wider world? If you have ever joined in a larger movement of self-limitation or self-deprivation, describe how and why you did so and to what effect.

- What might be some examples of city dwellers practicing self-limiting or kenosis for the benefit of other species or organisms in the city and elsewhere (137)?

More Exercises/Research:

- “*Good* cities will be part of the solution” (125). How do you envisage a good city? Be as specific as possible.
- As homework, spend an hour thinking about what it means to you for that hour to be living in the world as God’s body. How does being conscious of it change your thoughts and actions?

Further resources:

Google the United Nations Millennium Ecosystem Assessment that McFague mentions on p.127.

www.millenniumassessment.org/en/index.aspx and browse the site.

Read *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, or other books (for example on small houses) on self-limitation. How does *seeing* or *envisaging* a state in which “less is adequate” give you the courage to implement such shifts in expectation and consumption?

PART FOUR: DESPAIR AND HOPE WITHIN CLIMATE CHANGE

Chapter 8. Is a Different World Possible? Human Dignity and the Integrity of Creation

Though we dream of a more just and flourishing world, in reality our world is being destroyed (largely by us) and it is difficult to imagine and hope for renewal. We have been distracted from our complicity in global destruction by our attention to terrorism. It is easier to blame others for destruction than confront ourselves as destroyers.

What can we do? The Earth Charter reminds us of the importance of valuing *all* of creation, of seeing everything as “good.” People we talk of as “saints” practice thinking and loving in this way—without limit, even those otherwise understood as enemies. Everything is good.

More than that, everything is interdependent and needs each other, intimately,—which is why St. Francis spoke of Brother Sun and Sister Moon. We are all related. We are all part of one creation. We are all in this dangerously off-kilter world together. Alone we cannot set it right.

Jesus is an example of a person who had lots of “wild space” or space for thinking and acting unconventionally. If we have such room, or practice having such room by remembering where we come from and where we’re going, we can entertain the possibility of a different kind of world. To remain indifferent, and not imagine something better is to sin. To know but not to live differently is also sinful. One such way of living differently entails paying attention to the physical or material well-being of others (people and the rest of the earth)—as God does also to our material needs.

Key terms and concepts in this chapter:

Wild space (152-3)

Self-denial (156)

Strategy for reading this chapter:

Notice the many ways McFague enumerates in which we can see and be in the world with fresh eyes.

Questions for reflection/discussion:

- “An incarnate religion demands an incarnate spirituality” (155). How do you already incarnate your spirituality? What other ideas has this book given you?

Translating key concepts into everyday experience:

- Many people practice self-denial by giving to others. Read Bill Clinton’s 2007 book *Giving: How Each of Us Can Change the World* to be inspired at the range of possibilities, and find one thing you can do. You will read there plenty of examples of giving that was hard work and required perseverance (157). It’s going to take us all forming strong habits of self-denial to

make a dent in climate change. The example of God's continued residing with us is an encouragement to imitation.

More Exercises/Research:

- Create a wild and wonderful "family tree" that includes not only people but other creatures to which you are "related."
- Write a prayer or psalm or hymn to creation inspired by St. Francis' to the sun and moon.

Further Resources:

- Google Wangari Maathai whom McFague mentioned on p.155 as living a life concerned with others' material well-being. Or go to http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/maathai-bio.html
- Explore The Earth Charter Initiative website at www.earthcharter.org/ Look also at the religion page there.

Chapter 9. “The Dearest Freshness Deep Down Things”: The Holy Spirit and Climate Change

Hopkins’ poem *God’s Grandeur* (from which the title of this chapter is taken) epitomizes how we have sullied creation. Yet it also reminds us that the same hope and power of life that was the source of creation is present with us still: namely God, reality itself. And at the heart of God and therefore all reality is love. It is this that gives us hope.

Being made in God’s image, being a reflection of God, does not mean being a mini-judge but a mini-planetary caregiver and lover (167). We and all things are held within God. This gives us hope and therefore the freedom “to live lives of radical change” (171) because we are not thwarted by bleakness. Creation is all good. We hold on to that knowledge and it gives us hope and strength to continue loving the world practically and deeply.

Key terms or concepts in this chapter:

Hope
Perseverance
Sacramentality

Strategy for reading this chapter:

Be attentive to how many ways McFague suggests God is being itself, the reality underlying everything. Do you see now how her metaphor of the world as God’s body makes sense, even if at first it sounded alien to you?

Questions for reflection /discussion:

Gerard Manley Hopkins’s sense of hope despite humanity’s destruction of the earth arises out of his deeply held belief that the entire world lives within God (161). In the example of the hazelnut, Julian of Norwich demonstrates a similar trust. Can you describe why she has this trust, even though she was living in times of terrible decimation by the Black Death that must have felt somewhat like the situation of global warming we are facing now?

Translating key concepts into everyday experiences:

- On page 167, McFague states that we humans are “the one creature that has to decide to reflect God.” In other words, we have a choice about this.
- As regards climate change, how do we choose to reflect and not to reflect God?
- What images of human beings dominate in our society?
- How has reading this book changed the image of humanity you want to portray in your life? Be specific.
- How can we have hope about our future? What is the source of our hope?

Exercises/Research:

Read Romans 8.