

**Queer and Green:
Compassionate Care and Co-living with the Earth**

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But the relation to the face, always most intensely focused in the interhuman, now demands of planetary practices which find face across the width of the world...Catherine Keller¹

At times, I wonder whether the grief from losses during the height of the pandemic has ever left me. Or had it become embodied in my emotional-spiritual DNA and become dormant as the years have gone by, surfacing when memories of loss occur. Mourning for loss lover, companions, and relatives to HIV/AIDS may allow us to find solace and imagine hope. In my case, it provided impetus for myself to reconstruct my life over the years following Frank's death and receiving my doctorate from Harvard Divinity and finding at first adjunct teaching turned into a tenure track position at Webster University. The grief from loss of a lover, brother and companions provided a matrix of compassion care for not only for LGBTQI people but also for the poor and oppressed, and the exploited and oppressed Earth during the last two decades. I found collegiality with gay and lesbian scholars at the American Academy of Religion, serving a term on the Gay Men's Issues in Religion Group, but grief even after two decades flares up unconsciously in dreams during the month of May, just prior to Frank's anniversary of his death on May 22. .

Elizabeth Stuart makes a damning assessment about gay and lesbian theologies during the AIDS pandemic,

¹ Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, New York, Routledge, 2003, 7.

Gay and lesbian theology stuttered, stumbled, and crumbled over the graves those lost to AIDS....those theologians whose lives were most directly affected by AIDS appeared to have been paralyzed by the pre-existing theological paradigms and assumptions which they could only repeat.²

Stuart criticizes gay/lesbian theologians for not discussing the relationship of erotic desire, death, and afterlife. She wants to go beyond the heterosexual constructions of afterlife, noting how queering death might challenge the theo-orthodox visions of gender and sexuality.³ For Stuart, Christians live holistically the dying in Christ and resurrection by breaking down the duality between death and afterlife. However, she is kinder in her criticism of myself on this point, acknowledging that in my grief I queer the story of the beloved disciple to discuss loss of my spouse of sixteen years, Frank.⁴ I revisited my grief from loss of Frank in an autobiographical chapter in *Queering Christ* and working with a colleague in a comparative religious study of the role of grief in religious narratives.⁵

² Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2003, 75. See Stuart's full coverage of this issue: Ibid, 65 -78.

³ See also: Elizabeth Stuart, "Sex in Heaven: The Queering of Theological Discourse on Sexuality," in Jon Davies & Gerard Loughlin (eds), *Sex These Days: Essays on Theology, Sexuality, and Society*, Sheffield, Sheffield Academy Press, 1997, 184-204; Stuart, "Queering Death," in Marcella Althaus-Reid, & Lisa Isherwood (eds), *The Sexual Theologians: Essays on God, Sex, and Politics*, London, T & T Clark, 2004, 58-70.

⁴ Robert Goss, "The Beloved Disciple: A Queer Bereavement Narrative in the Time of AIDS," in *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible*, ed. by Robert Goss & Mona West, Cleveland, The Pilgrim Press, 2000, 206-218; C

⁵ Robert E. Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus ACTEDUP*, Cleveland, The Pilgrim Press, 2002, 24-30. Robert Goss & Dennis Klass, *Dead But Not Lost: Grief Narratives in Religious Traditions*, New York, AltaMira Press, 2000. ;

I expect that during the height of the AIDS pandemic gay/lesbian theologians suffered from post-traumatic syndrome as a result of the intense and massive losses of friends and lovers.⁶ At times, personal theodicies over loss of loved ones and friends to AIDS were emotionally overwhelming to many in the greater gay/lesbian community. Secondly, many Christian churches refused to celebrate the funerals of gay men with AIDS that we loved and care for, and their on-going demonization formed an obstacle too great for theologizing. Those of us who were clergy and theologians faced on the spot theologizing in the pastoral occasion of addressing the grief of survivors; often we clergy were also survivors as well, for we traumatized by the overwhelming loss from congregants, friends, and strangers without a place for a life memorial. Imagining hope was created in our ritual celebrations, becoming a quilt for one another, or creating an AIDS quilt to remember our lost ones.

Stuart acknowledges that non-theologians employed non-theological resources to theologize about death from HIV/AIDS and affirm resurrection in linking objects that evoked the memory and the presence of loss companions such as making a quilt panel.⁷ I would also note that gay/lesbian theologians also endured grief and loss of loved ones and family, compounded by anger towards the ecclesial exclusion and stigmatization of gay men with AIDS.

For example, J. Michael Clark embraces a tragic post-Christian perspective, reaching out to eco-feminist writings. But I find his writings, at times, too dark, tragic,

⁶ Eric Rofes, *Reviving the Tribe: Gay Men's Sexuality and Culture in the Ongoing Epidemic*, New York, Routledge, 2013. .

⁷ Stuart, *Ibid*, 75.

and without hope for myself even as he embraces and eco-theist faith.⁸ He rejects Judaic Christian scriptures as ideological/theological abuse for excluding gays/lesbians but also justifies blaming the victims living and dying with AIDS. What Clark rejects, I have found as a spiritual resource for maintaining hope and faith in Christ during the darkest days of tears and loss, even when I was threatened with overwhelming despair and with the desire to contract AIDS and die with my spouse. I placed myself at risk in a fit of grief for the summer after Frank's death. It was through the compassionate touch of a stranger, a gay man who held me as I wept uncontrollably and tried to make sense of Frank's death and the insensitivity of my family to my personal loss.

But on the other hand, I believe that Clark is too critical of the leather community and gay life style, and his blame for AIDS on gay men comes across too simplistic, and failing to understand the abuse, repression, and exclusion of gay men have undergone.⁹ What I do credit Clark with is his initial theological attempt to create an ecological faith, but it failed for me at that time with my personal alignment Christian tradition and queer readings of scripture. It remained as backdrop for my personal theological knowledge.

Speaking for myself, it took years to deal with the loss of Frank, my brother, and so many friends, and the decades of HIV/AIDS has impacted me in my resistance to mainstream patriarchal Christianity and outreach to LGBT folks abused by Christianity. I threw myself into my academic teaching at Webster University and church work with

⁸ J. Michael Clark, "Sex, Earth, & Death in Gay Theology," *Journal of Critical Environmental Studies*, vol. 6, 1994, 34- 39.

⁹ J. Michael Clark, *Defying the Darkness: Gay Theology in the Shadows*, Cleveland, The Pilgrim Press, 1997, See Ken Stone, "Safer Texts: Reading Biblical Laments in the Age of AIDS," *Theology & Sexuality*, No. 10, March 1999, 16-27.

MCC in St. Louis to sublimate the pain of my own grief. I had earlier immersed myself in ACT UP and Queer Nation in St. Louis as means to work against the injustice around AIDS and homophobia, and I later became distracted with the publication of Jesus ACTED UP, book signings, and media interviews from my grief over Frank and many others. I realize that grief over time becomes minimized, but it never leaves you. It has unconscious grip over your psychological DNA and becomes compounded with further grief and loss in life. I believe the losses from AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s prepared me for the last battle of my life: battle for the reverence of life and the care for Earth. The transition to Earthcare activism originated in my compassionate care for people living with HIV/AIDS, fighting for justice and hope in the midst of worst days of the pandemic, becoming a member of ACT UP and Queer Nation, the retrieval of erotic embodiment, experience as a Christian pastor and college professor, and the interaction with wonderful folks within my congregation and colleagues who loved the Earth and all life.

Earlier Gay Pioneers to Climate Activism

Earlier attempts at fusing ecofeminism and gay theology in 1990s brought a correlation between AIDS and environmental issues. In particular, I accepted as true J. Michael Clark's correlation between disposable consumerism rampant in our society and the idea of disposable people living with AIDS. Clark writes,

In the history of gay and lesbian communities, never has our own expendability been so evident as the rising incidence of anti-gay/lesbian violence and particularly in the AIDS health crisis. The same heteropatriarchal value hierarchy

that insists that nature is reducible to expandable resources also insists on dichotomizing innocent and not innocent (read expandable) victims of AIDS...¹⁰

Clark observes a that there is a correlation of cultural disvaluation and disposability affect the lives of gays/lesbians through violence and AIDS apathy but also shapes environmental cultural and religious values as well.¹¹ He exposes the patterns of domination and oppression in human and nature, reclaiming the rainbow covenant with Noah and non-human life. He comprehends the rainbow covenant as symbol of gay (LBT—my addition) solidarity with oppressed peoples and nature.¹² Clark develops the ecofeminist paradigm of placing humanity in a web of interrelated, quoting Catherine Keller:

We are, as everything, that is, an instance of becoming-in-relation. Nothing is independent of anything else. This is the fundamental ecological vision, applicable to human culture as well as to non-human communities.¹³

Clark's appropriation of interdependence and interconnectedness caught my Buddhist attention since these notions are central to the hermeneutical framework for Mahayana "emptiness" philosophy and the Buddhist development of compassion as an ethical and spiritual practice. It becomes the basis for ethic of compassion, of finding ourselves interdependent and interrelated with all life and the Earth.

¹⁰ J. Michael Clark, "From Gay Men's Lives Towards a More Inclusive, Ecological Vision," *Journal of Men's Studies*, vol. 1, no. 4, May 1993, 35.

¹¹ Ibid, 12.

¹² J. Michael Clark, *Beyond Our Ghettos: Gay Theology in an Ecological Perspective*, Cleveland, The Pilgrim Press, 1993, 42.

¹³ Ibid, 55. Catherine Keller, "Women Against Wasting the World: Notes on Eschatology and Ecology," *Reweaving the World: The emergence of Eco-Feminism*, ed. by Irene Diamond & Gloria Orenstein, San Francisco, Sierra Books, 2nd edition, 1990, 257.

In *Gay and Gaia*, Daniel Spencer elaborates upon Clark's correlation of disposability and dispensability, noting two significant cultural consequences:

First, it can help make visible the connections between lesbian and gay oppression and the oppression of other disposable segments of human society, such as African American youth and men, Native Americans, homeless and mentally ill persons, and all others deemed dispensable under the logic of white supremacist capitalism. Second, it draws attention to the ecological costs of bodily integrity. Whether it is the integrity of individual lesbian and gay bodies or of the wider lesbian and gay body politic that is violated, there is a high cost to larger society that in turn is passed on to our biotic communities.¹⁴

Spencer singles out these salient features that emerged within the AIDS pandemic.

Other population groups-- non-white men, bisexual men and women, the poor, transgendered women working as sex workers to make enough monies to afford gender re-assignment surgery, Africans and others-became infected and suffered from AIDS phobia and other oppressions. Spencer tries to overcome the cultural ethic of disposability and dispensability, but he does through the appropriation of feminist theologies such as Carter Heyward in recovering embodiment, mutuality, and reciprocity. He calls to use the concept of "ecological location" to rethink theology:

By ecological location, I mean enlarging the term social location to include...where human and non-human creatures and communities are situated with respect to other members of the biotic community as within human society and within the broader biotic community as well as conceiving other members of the biotic community and the biotic community itself as locatable active agents that historically interact with and shape the other members of the ecological community, including human beings.¹⁵

Here Spencer de-centers anthropocentric context of most theologies by providing a ecological location comprehensive the interactive reality of humanity in a web of

¹⁴ Daniel Spencer, *Gay and Gaia: Ethics, Ecology, and the Erotic*, Cleveland, The Pilgrim Press, 1996, 347.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 295-296.

interrelated environmental relations, including other life and the biotic processes of the Earth herself. Daniel Spencer provides a wider and interactive theological framework for an ecological theological ethic than Clark who rejects a kinship model of the web life for a residual anthropocentric theology.¹⁶

These gay theological correlations of Spencer and Clark were voiced in the 1990s but not fully elaborated upon. How much theological significance these early attempts had upon my own theological psyche is too hard to assess. I would place them as background information to my developing my environmental consciousness and activism. I find that Spencer's *Gay and Gaia* made a stronger case for correlating the body with environmental theology, an insight appropriated by theological feminism, eco-feminism, and the gay recovery of the body and sex. This appealed to my explorations of erotic theologies, queer embodiment, and queer theology.

Jay Johnson briefly mentions, and all too briefly in my opinion, John Gibson's call to a vision of enchantment or re-enchantment of the world to save us from planetary disaster:¹⁷ "Planetary life depends on whether human beings will understand environmentalism as deeply spiritual work....This spiritual practice now requires "a quest for a new kinship with nature."¹⁸ Johnson qualifies that this kinship with nature

¹⁶ See; *Ibid*, 300-338.

¹⁷ Jay Emerson Johnson, *Divine Communion: A Eucharistic Theology of Sexual Intimacy*, New York, Seabury, 2013, 147-149. Johnson quotes John William Gibson's book, *A Reenchanted World: The Quest for a New Kinship with Nature*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 2009.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 147.

means “other-than-human.” God find us and all life enchanting—which means the thriving and flourishing of all planetary life.

Kathy Rudy in *Loving Animals: Towards a New Animal Advocacy*—ethicist Kathy Rudy starts her exploration of human-animal relations by similar approach to Webb’s but dissimilar to the hermeneutical approaches of animal rights and animal theology writers.¹⁹

Put differently, this approach is advocacy is not only about human loving animals but also animal loving us back. It recognizes that animals have choices, and one of the choices many of them make is to become loving, to be loving animals. They transcend the boundaries of their bodies and their species by trusting, caring for, and communing with us. Thus, “loving” is both a verb and an adjective, something both of us also are.²⁰

I trust and endorse a great deal of Rudy’s hermeneutic of emotion and “love” to address the complex and multi-dimensional question of human animal relations. I have read so much disgustingly abusive theologies and human moral rationalizations for animal cruelty, enslavement, and killing.

It is hard to read how Christian theologies have been made animals invisible or have rationalized how animals are incapable of suffering and thus do not deserve ethical consideration. Perhaps, humanity may blinded itself to its

¹⁹ Kathy Rudy, *Loving Animal: Towards a New Animal Advocacy*, Minneapolis, The university of Minnesota, 2011.

²⁰ Ibid, (kindle edition) loc. 50.

treatment of animals through its anthropocentrism and its quest for domination. We have blinded ourselves by the fact that humans eat animals, use them for experiments in pharmaceutical and cosmetic labs, hunt animals for sport, enslave animals for domestic service, and hunt animals for sport. We make animals invisible to our moral and spiritual gaze.

I share Rudy's almost Buddhist perspective and goal:

I firmly believe that given the right opportunity most humans can connect with animals, can look in their faces and see the spirit of a fellow being, and can make the changes necessary to improve their lot in life. ... Few people really want to see another being suffer. The problem is always either that we see the suffering (in factory farms or labs, for example) or they don't understand that an animal's life is made of the same "stuff" as yours or mine.²¹

Rudy's hermeneutic is one of compassionate solidarity by exposing our deep emotional connections to animals. Her ethical advocacy has an implicit goal of changing hearts and transforming human relationships with animals. For myself, this is a spiritual exploration. This issue is critical for humanity to recover our relationship with animals but with our compassionate selves.

Yet there is much more need for LGBTQI theology to address climate theology, our relationship to the world and other than human life. Queer theologies need to expand its liberative focus to deepen the intersections between

²¹ Rudy, *Loving Animals*, loc. 175-182.

queer and green theologies. We have only begun to address queer theologies and how heterosexism and patriarchy and complicit silences of queer communities of faith have oppressed the Earth and other than human life.

Another Trajectory to Green Conversion

There was yet another trajectory of theological development for my interest in green theology. I taught a course on Religion and Nature, using the works of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sallie McFague, Thomas Berry, Teilhard de Chardin, Native American traditions and American conservationists, and Buddhist green writers such as Joanna Macy and other Buddhist writers.²² . I continued to immerse myself in various liberation and contextual theologies enjoying, especially, the theological writings of the Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff. In 1985, Leonardo Boff was silenced for a year by his own doctoral mentor at Tübingen—Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger—for his book *Charism and Power*.²³ Again in 1992, he was silenced again to prevent him from attending and participating in Eco-92 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. His books on St. Francis of Assisi united liberation theology's preferential option for the poor with the saint's stress on poverty and living out universal kinship. In the twenty-fifth anniversary edition, Boff writes,

²² For example: Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams (ed), *Buddhism and Ecology*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997. And Jay McDaniel's use of Buddhist metaphysics of interrelatedness: Jay B. Mc Daniel, *With Roots and Wings; Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1995.

²³ Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power, Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, New York, Crossroad, 1985.

Through his deep humanity, Francis of Assisi has become an archetype of the human ideal: open to God, universal brother, and caretaker of nature and of Mother Earth. He belongs not only to Christianity but for all humankind.²⁴

Francis, one of my favorite saints, provided an archetype for Boff's exploration of liberation theology's care for the poor and his care for the Earth and all life.²⁵ These two are intimately entwined in Boff's later theological writings. In *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, he boldly asserts, "Social injustice leads to ecological injustice and vice-versa."²⁶(21?) .He comprehends, sin as the social rupture among human relations while ecological sin is the rupture between humanity and nature. Ecological justice is intimately intertwined with social justice. In his *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Boff taps into Francis' notion of ecological or biotic democracy. He writes, "...all things in nature are citizens, have rights, deserve respect and reverence...Today, the common good is not exclusively human; it is the common good of all nature."²⁷ He espouses Francis' notion of a biotic democracy of life: "we must towards a planetary and social democracy."²⁸ Boff retrieves a notion that is central to Celtic Christianity that the Earth and all life is not punished because of a primal human sin and develops a Franciscan notion from Dun Scotus that God's incarnation in Jesus was due to sin. God intended

²⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Francis of Assisi: A Model for Human Liberation*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2006, loc. 78.

²⁵ See other uses of Francis as a model of compassionate care for Nature; John Hart: *Sacramental Commons; Christian Ecological Ethics*, New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publication, 2006; Ilia Delia, *Compassion: Living in the Spirit of St. Francis*, Cincinnati, St. Anthony's Messenger, 2011.

²⁶ Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 101-102.

²⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1997, 112.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 131.

to incarnate Godself regardless of human sin. Boff's prior commitment to the poor and liberation theology is retained in his notion of environmental theology. South American liberation theology emerged from listening to the cry of the poor, and ecological theology come from listening to the cries of the water, the forests the animals, and the Earth. Boff has extended the notion of the preferential option for the poor to include the preferential option for the Earth. Human poverty is interwoven with the domination and exploitation of the Earth, and liberation theology expands to environmental theology. In a lecture, Boff observed,

We need to express these cries. The greatest poor person is planet Earth, Pachamama, which is devastated and oppressed, and should be included in liberation theology. As Sobrino has rightly said, "the earth is being crucified."²⁹

Finally, Leonardo Boff honors the indigenous peoples and their ancestral wisdom of living with the Amazon lands, for he believes that the experience of God of the original peoples provide lessons for us of sacramental universe and potential bearers of theophany. For Boff, a tree is not just a tree but a living being with many arms (branches) and thousands of tongues (leaves). God is everywhere immanent in nature, and if we recover such a kinship with life and the Earth from the life experiences of the original peoples, we begin to listen to the cries of the Earth, and we live out an ethics of unlimited compassion and shared responsibility for the care of the Earth. One of the strengths of Boff's liberation theology, inclusive of the poor and the Earth, is his

²⁹ Graziela Wolfart, "Liberation theology and ecological concerns: Leonardo Boff and the call of Mother Earth," October 11, 2012, <http://iglesiadescalza.blogspot.com/2012/10/liberation-theology-and-ecological.html>: For a correlation of climate change and its adverse effects upon the poor, see: Lael Brainard, Abigail Jones, and Nigel Purvis (eds), *Climate Change and Global Poverty: A Billion Lives in Balance?*, Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2009.

awareness that as the Earth is harmed, so the poor suffer even more so. There is an interdependent relation between the poor and the Earth.

When I read Boff's *Virtues: For Another Possible World*, I confess it was one of the few books that I personally wished I authored. I wrote endorsement quote for Boff's *Virtues*:

Leonardo Boff spins a spirituality of St. Francis into an ecological, cosmic, political—albeit human—vision of what our world could become if we are willing to practice hospitality, co-living, tolerance, respect, feasting together. As a pastor whose church is earth-friendly and becoming green with solar panels, I found Boff's *Virtues*, credible, sustainable spirituality for all peoples of faith to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Very few theologians weave environmental and social justice into a unified holistic vision as Boff has accomplished here.³⁰

In the Preface, Boff defines the nature of virtues:

Virtues constitute the realm of excellence and of values, as such virtues clearly possess a utopian appeal. It belongs to the nature of utopia to transport us to increasingly higher and broader horizons....their function is to unsettle and bring about change. Virtues are similar to the stars: we can never touch them, but they guide navigators and enchant our nights. They can always suggest to us practices that are increasingly more creative and allow utopia not to remain only a utopia. We can always grow and better ourselves.³¹

Boff grounds his ethics around three constellations of virtues: 1) hospitality and compassion, 2) co-living and tolerance, 3) communality. These virtues, I used as themes for greening series of sermons several years ago. For Boff, humanity stands at a critical juncture in history between forming a global partnership to care for the Earth

³⁰ Leonardo Boff, *Virtues: For Another Possible World*, Eugene, Cascade Books, 2011, back cover.

³¹ Boff, *Virtues*, ppppp

and for one another or accept the disappearance of human and the extinction of biodiversity.

Leonardo Boff gives a marvelous example that serves as parable how to listen to the cries of the Earth and listen to the cries of the poor. In 1952, a group of the Little Sisters of Jesus traveled to the remote state of Mato Grosso, a jungle area in central Brazil. They heard the Tapirape indigenous tribe faced extinction. Their unique way of life—co-living with the natural forests—would soon be lost to human history. I read this story in a new book that will soon be published by the Brazilian theologian and author. Before I continue the story, let me read the mission statement of the Little Sisters of Jesus:³²

We believe that a truly contemplative life can be lived in the midst of the ordinary life of people around the world, simply sharing their day to day life, living conditions, work and dreams - as Jesus did at Nazareth. As our prayer becomes grounded in this ordinary life, as friendships grow with neighbors and co-workers, together we look for the face of God in the midst of the joys and struggles that arise.

Not a passive approach, "presence" is what we learn from Jesus through the Incarnation. It is a dynamic way of simply placing oneself within situations in

³² Charles de Foucauld was a French Catholic priest and missionary that went to live with Muslims in the Algerian desert in the early 20th century. I read his biography while in Jesuit novitiate. Charles de Foucauld's aim was not to directly convert the Muslim tribal folks but to live with them and share their differences together. He believed that he as a Christian could live Muslims and despite differences in religion and cultures, he could love them in the spirit of Jesus who sees all peoples as brothers and sisters surrounded by God's grace. Internal conflicts led to his murder. Yet he inspired men and women to form religious communities—the Little Brothers of the Gospel and the Little Sisters of Jesus-- whose function is to prayerfully live the presence of Jesus among peoples who are different or poor or suffering. Charles de Foucauld, 1856-1916. http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20051113_de-foucauld_en.html

*such a way that one's very life becomes rooted and dependent upon what happens there.*³³

By the time, the Little Sisters of Jesus arrived, the Tapirape's numbers were reduced from 1500 to 47 because of war, disease brought by white Brazilians, and few women to have children.

*The Tapirape will disappear. The white people will finish us. The land has value, the game has value, the fish has value. But the native Indian value has no value whatsoever.*³⁴

*The ranches are surrounding us (...) the land companies are taking away all of our land. Why did the whites want to pacify us? Afterwards, what is it going to happen to us in the middle of whites working for whites that want to take away our land? Is it meant that the Indian should have nothing and to put an end to the Indians? The whites arrived and decided that the Indian could find another place to live. Where should we go? The Indian lives in the place where he knows. If he moves to another place in the riverbanks, in the hills, in the lowlands this is no good.*³⁵

The Sisters asked permission to co-live with the Tapirape. They were welcome to live in the communal hut but they decided to live in a log cabin that they built with a chapel with their own hands. They lived Jesus' gospel of love, mirroring the presence of the Incarnate Christ. They worked with the Tapirape to restore the orchards, enjoyed moments of bounty of food and scarcity of food, learning their language, and encourage the Tapirape to preserve their culture and religion. By co-living with the tribe as co-equals, they restored self-esteem to the tribe and became midwives to a people who now numbered 500. They lived the message of grace proclaimed by Jesus, "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

³³ Little Sisters of Jesus, <http://www.rc.net/org/littlesisters/>

³⁴ Boff, *Virtues*, 123.

³⁵ *Tapirape People*, Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tapirap%C3%A9_people

The Little Sisters of Jesus lived the parable of the Good Samaritan; they practiced the compassion of God that Jesus spoke: "Be compassionate as your Abba is."(Luke 6:36) The Sisters stripped themselves of their egos and their western culture to learn the ways of a different culture and religion. The Sisters turned the Tapirape tribe into their neighbor, taking Jesus' commandment of loving your neighbor as yourself. They practiced the virtues of co-living--love, compassionate care, respect for the other life, listening and attentiveness to cultural differences, learning the language, and living in solidarity with and as the Tirirape tribe lived. Occasionally, the sisters would hold the Tapirape males for getting drunk because of the stress of the white men who wanted their lands. They stood in solidarity with the tribe, learned about the ancestral grace of Tapirape in living with the land. It is important to recognize as the Sisters co-lived with the Tapirape; they also learned how to live with Nature. Within co-living, real learning takes place, for there is a respect for differences and living with differences, of sharing other ways of life and sharing other people's struggles. Through co-living, the Sisters learned as much from the Tapirape as they demonstrated respect for the dignity of the trib. And together they brought the tribe back from near extinction to life.

At the end of fifty years co-living with the Tapirape, not one member of the tribe converted to Christianity. Their mission was to co-live with the earth and Tapirape. Co-living raises the questions: Why we do live together? And how we live together? Co-living is the function of midwives who birth Christ through living the presence of Christ's

love. It includes the virtues of hospitality and compassion.³⁶ Boff describes his virtue of co-living and coexisting:

Co-living and coexisting are “ways of being” that are encompassing and inclusive. To live is an outcome of life, of life taken in all complexities, of life shared with others, of coexisting with others and of sharing dynamically in others’ lives.. of sharing others’ way of being, of sharing others’ struggles, quests, defeats, and victories, It is within that real learning takes place, real learning as a collective effort for knowledge, as a vision of the world, as values that guide life and as a utopia that the future open ended.³⁷

The Little Sisters of Jesus preserved a part of human life that can teach us so much about the ancestral grace of loving God by co-living with Nature and learning from the original peoples of the Earth. We have lost that ancestral grace that God’s divine presence companions and cherishes all life on Earth.

Boff provides a theological model and a parable how liberation theology can become even more inclusive to include the poor to include the poverty and oppression of the Earth. But I have oc-lived with HIV/AIDS in the community I have served as an educator and a pastor for more than twenty-years. I lost many friends to AIDS, including my long-time spouse Frank and my own brother Bill. I have found myself praying for years for a day when I could celebrate a cure to HIV. My own husband Joe, who is HIV, and many friends who have lived nearly three decades with HIV, have formed a theological and cultural matrix for on-going reflection. But once you work on the oppression of gay and lesbian, people living with AIDS, you become sensitive the oppression of one or several groups of people are interrelated. If your faith includes a

³⁶ Boff, *Virtues*, (Hospitality) pp. 35-115 and (Compassion) pp. 128-135.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 135.

spirituality of compassion and care for justice, your justice commitments widen as you realize how they are related to one another. For example, my husband and I joined a protest with Bienestar over the incarceration of an undocumented Transgendered Hispanic woman with AIDS by ICE (Immigration Customs Enforcement). ICE officials denied her HIV antivirals, and Victoria Arellano died during lengthy imprisonment.³⁸ Here AIDS, transgendered issues, racial injustice and immigration justice overlap.

We Work to Save What We Love and Care About

Compassion has been the driving force of my spirituality for decades, starting with my Jesuit experience of serving in the House of the Dying Destitute in Calcutta in the early 1970s, through my early perception of Jesus and radical inclusive table fellowship, in graduate studies of Buddhism, to working for justice with ACT UP and Queer Nation, LGBT equality, marriage equality, transgendered equality, immigration reform, and climate activism. I quote again Henri Nouwen:

*Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human...*³⁹

³⁸ Bienestar, <https://www.bienestar.org/eng/page/29/Home-Page.html>.: See Victoria Arellano, <http://www.workers.org/2007/us/trans-0913/>. My experience is that undocumented Hispanics folks in Southern California are terrified of ICE. I have heard stories how families have been separated and how ICE deported an American born mentally challenged teenager to Mexico. It took his parents six months to find him.

³⁹ Henri J. M. Nouwen Donald P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion: A Reflection on Christian Life*, New York, Image Books, 1982, 4.

Pastoral work for a decade at MCC in the Valley expanded my queer theology and writings-- juxtaposing pastoral duties and preaching within an inclusive LGBT church, community activism, teaching at Claremont School of Theology and in the Religious Studies Department of California State University, Northridge (CSUN), legally marrying my husband and marrying some thirty-five same-sex couples during the window of the California Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the definition of marriage as one man, one woman and the vote to ban same-sex marriage by Prop 8 on November 4, 2008; producing Terrence McNally's play *Corpus Christi* which later produced a documentary *Playing with Redemption*.⁴⁰ The cast became a missionary outreach of MCC in the Valley. During the decade, I served as chaplain to the LGBT LA Leather, motorcycle, and BDSM community—harnessing their resources and generous fundraisers to feed the poor as well collect toys for children with HIV in Los Angeles. These pastoral experiences were formative for theological expansions. But the basis for such pastoral inclusiveness was based on the open mission of my own church's mission: radical inclusive love practiced by Jesus open table practices and the open invitation to table initiated by Rev. Troy Perry from the very beginning of the Metropolitan Community Church in 1968.⁴¹

⁴⁰ See: Nic Arnzen and the Cast of *Corpus Christi*, "Communion: Playing with Redemption," in *Queering Christianity: Finding a Place at the Table for LGBTQI Christians*, ed. By Robert E. Shore-Goss, Thomas Bohache, Patrick S. Cheng, and Mona West (eds), Santa Barbara, Praeger, 2013, 229-250.

⁴¹ Robert E. Shore-Goss, "Introduction," in *Queering Christianity*, 1-24.

I had a conversation with our gardener. It was a speculative “what if” I had been able to find a full time academic position after the homophobic tenure fight at Webster, would I have been as green and passionate in fighting climate change as I am at this point. I am not sure. I believe that one of the gifts as pastor of MCC (now MCC/UCC) in the Valley has forged a passion for fighting climate change and compassionate care for the Earth. There have been days that I have witnessed the transformation of this dying community that has rediscovered life renewed in the church’s transformation and its garden. I have watched our gardener, a personal friend and member, as he labored to cultivate and care for the garden as it expands. All plants have been donated by various folks, both church members and friends and stake-holders and even strangers. The garden has been literally been a serendipitous gift, a grace-filled event for myself and others in the urban setting of North Hollywood. I enjoy observing our gardener caring and watering the church garden—prayerfully realizing how much God loves gardening and that God invites us to be gardeners of the Earth.⁴² Gardens, and the church garden, in particular—are restorative of the spirit, and through the natural rhythms of birth, life and growth, decay and rebirth, we participate in the beauty of the garden and witness a living parable how God creates, gardens, and experiences nature as beloved. The garden has been instrumental in my spiritual growth in reverence for life and my commitment to care for this particular garden as it is symbolic of the garden

⁴² See: Michael Abbate, *Gardening Eden, How Creation Care will change Your Faith, Your life, and Our World*, Colorado Spring, Waterbrook Press, 2004; Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (ed), *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth*, Grand Rapids, W. B. Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 1987; and Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2003.

of the Earth. My ecological spirituality deepened as a practicum for my reading about ecology and religion for years. I grew in a profound reverence for the God of life and the God of creation.

It was a natural to take up climate issues after we showed an advanced screening Al Gore's *Inconvenient Truth* in 2005 to the church and the LGBTQI community. Al Gore sounded a "wake up" call to care for the Earth to stem the carbon emissions leading to climate change. I started to include a component on climate change in a number of my undergraduate Religious Studies courses. At church, we made the Earth a member of our congregation to stress our responsibility to pastorally care for our members. I became aware of the embodied connections between eucharist and the Earth. With the advent of solar panels to the church, we started a process of "greening the church" with reduction of energy usage through CFLs and LED lights, tankless water heater, high efficiency and low flush toilets and enzyme urinals that flushed three times a day to save water in a drought conditions of Southern California, recycling, composting, creating a remarkable urban garden and community garden, and community advocacy and education.⁴³ At the installation of our solar panels, Rev. Troy Perry, the founder of MCC, attended and spoke about Earth Care. We partnered with California Interfaith Power & Light in a congregational covenant to care and advocate for the Earth against climate change. It was one of most significant relationships, along with Druid/Wiccans friends who have assisted us in building our garden. Both these covenantal and personal relationships have helped us to deepen our compassionate

⁴³ Robert E. Shore-Goss, "Grace is Green: Incarnational Inclusivities," in *Queering Christianity*, 65-82.

care for the Earth. In 2011, MCC in the Valley won a Green Oscar for Advocacy with California Interfaith Power & Light, and has continued the process of co-living with the Earth and all life.⁴⁴ On Sunday, we have a number of families with their companion dogs at worship and now have a dog barking room where the service can be watched when dogs start barking at one another during service. This has not been used very often. The failure of the current MCC leadership to adequately address climate change and promote green policies with its churches led us into dual affiliation with the United Church of Christ and its more developed environmental justice ministry.⁴⁵

My own theological expansion found its matrix in studying compassion with Jesus and his ministry and the Mahayana Buddhist stress on the bodhisattva path and compassion.⁴⁶ The Council of Conscience, a group of religious figures, scholars, and humanitarians, drafted the Charter of Compassion. The opening paragraph reads as follows:

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Interfaith Power & Light, <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/>

⁴⁵ UCC Environmental Justice Ministry: <http://www.ucc.org/search-results.html?cx=004140695161086210870%3Aqbbk4dptm5e&cof=FORID%3A9&ie=UTF-8&q=environmental%20justice&submit=Search>

⁴⁶ See: Robert Shore-Goss: "Bodhisattva Christianity: A Case of Multiple Religious Belonging," in *Queering Christianity*, 251-270.

⁴⁷ <https://charterforcompassion.org/the-charter>

While I signed the Charter of Compassion, there was one glaring weakness that I noticed. It read as an anthropocentric, humanity centered document, and seemingly failed to address compassionate care for other than human life and for the Earth herself. As I explored and search the Charter's website, it linked me to the Earth Charter and a number of ecological caring sites.⁴⁸ There is no disagreement with the Charter and myself on the centrality of restoring compassion to the center of all religions and morality and to the care for humanity and for other life and the Earth herself..

The two most important religious traditions to the formation of my spiritual practice are Christianity and Buddhism.

First, Jesus brought the central message of compassionate care to his ministry and practice of the reign of God. Jesus' hospitality—his indiscriminate invitation to outcasts, people with suspect impurity, sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, and others--challenged many Jewish holiness groups: The Sadducees, Pharisees, the Sabbath fundamentalists, the Qumran community, and others. They all took serious the holiness code of the priests in Leviticus: "Be holy as your God is holy." (Lev. 11:45) Holiness was the basis of the purity codes for first century C.E. Palestinian Jewish holiness groups who categorized every person, animal, food, and thing into pure/impure

But in Luke's Gospel, we hear Jesus' words: "Be compassionate as your Abba God is compassionate." (Luke6:36) It was the basis of God's hospitality and Jesus' practice of the open table that invited all sorts of people with suspect purities, sinners and the throw-away people. At the heart of the religious conflict are two claims: First,

⁴⁸ <https://charterforcompassion.org/search/node/Earth>

God is so holy that it is the few or a select group who imitate God's holiness. The second is that God is compassionate and ignores the holiness and human made boundaries that divide people. God is very accessible, in fact, cares for all people.⁴⁹

For Jesus, God was like a compassionate father and mother. Compassion is related to the Hebrew word for the womb of a woman (*rechem*), and the word "compassion" derived (*rachamim*, plural, meaning compassions, mercies) is derived from the word "womb." . Like the womb, divine compassion is life-giving, womb-like, creating the possibility of new birth and life. It is a feeling that comes from deep within the human bowels and flows outwards. As a mother loves the children of her womb, so God love us in a similar fashion. Compassion is what makes a mother feel deeply for her children. For God to be like a womb or wombish is to say that God gives us birth and shows care for us. Womb-like compassion has nuances of giving life, nourishing, caring, embracing and all-encompassing. In *Jesus ACTED UP*, I spoke the practice of solidarity:

His (Jesus') basileia practice of solidarity was compassionate identification with the oppressed and his active commitment to social change. The practice of solidarity is what I include in the term of love-making in later chapters; it is vital to justice-doing.⁵⁰

If you read the word "compassion" for the "solidarity," you comprehend my meaning and usage of the word. One feels in solidarity with someone or another being in pain; it takes up the Latin derivative (*compassio*) of the English compassion, meaning to undergo or endure with "passion" or to suffer with. Such personal and emotional

⁴⁹ Anne Primavesi & Jennifer Henderson, *Our God Has No Favorites*, San Jose, CA, Resource Publications Inc., 1989. ,

⁵⁰ Robert Goss, *Jesus ACTED UP: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1993, 75.

identification with a suffering person, suffering group, or suffering animals, or a suffering Earth leads to compassionate identification with the other and the need for engaged action to alleviate the suffering or the causes of the suffering. It is our capacity to enter a situation with the heart, experiencing joy and pain with another, to share with their sufferings. The Buddha spoke of the four immeasurables cultivated in meditation. They are immeasurable because they are directed to all sentient beings, whether human or other than human: loving kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. For example, loving kindness, compassion, and appreciative joy, Buddhists teacher use the analogy of a mother for her newborn child wishing her child to enjoy good health, alleviating suffering of her child from illness, and joy at the success of her child. Equanimity adds the dimension of all sentient beings, human and non human life. It intersects with the other immeasurable widening the Buddhist practitioner's focus to all sentient beings.⁵¹ All life and the world are the goals of the four immeasurable minds of love. Thich Nhat Hanh's *Love Letter to the Earth* writes,

Real change will happen only when we fall in love with our planet. Only love can show us to live in harmony with nature and with each and save us from the devastating effects of environmental destruction and climate change. When we recognize the virtues and talents of the Earth, we feel connected to her and love is born in our hearts. We want to be connected. That is the meaning of love: to be at one. When you love someone, you want to take care of that person and as you would take care of yourself. When you love like this, it's reciprocal. We will do anything for the benefit of the Earth, and we can trust that she, in turn, will do everything in her power for our well being.⁵²

⁵¹ Karen Armstrong, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, New York, Alfred A Knopf, 2011, 86-88. .

⁵² Thich Nhat Hanh, *Love Letter to the Earth*, Berkeley, Parrallax Press, 2013, loc.208.

Thich Nhat Hanh uses the four immeasurables as the basis of his compassionate care for the Earth. His Buddhist metaphysics connects him to the Earth: to all humanity and sentient beings and the home we call Earth. Buddhist describes this interconnectedness or interrelatedness as co-dependent origination, and Thich Nhat Hanh coins the word “interbeing.” This term means that everything and everyone are interconnected and interwoven with everything and everyone.

For Jesus, God’s compassionate love is a vital creative force in our lives. God’s compassion, I believe, is another word for grace. Compassion always moves ministry beyond the confines of self-centeredness and exclusive practices. Jesus instructs his disciples, “Be as compassionate as your God is compassionate.” He replaces the central notion of the priestly code (Leviticus 19:2) “Be holy as your God is holy” for the Jewish holiness groups overly concerned about who is pure/impure. We are to feel for another as a mother feels for her children and act in accord with her feelings. In this case, Jesus instructs us to be compassionate as God compassionate feels and acts for all God’s children. God is compassion and love, and the central quality of a Christian centered in God and God’s Christ is compassionate love. By compassion, Jesus is brought to heal the blind, the lame, and crippled. By compassion, he breaks rules because a higher vision of love and grace demands that rules be broken in favor of healing, wholeness, and grace. Jesus offers parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son to instruct his disciples how to be compassionate in the world. Grace is compassionate care manifested in this world and our cultivation of sacramental relationship to the world.

In covering climate change in class, I use Sallie McFague and Thich Nhat Hanh to compare and contrast their metaphysics or caring for the Earth and fighting climate change. These two authors—Christian and Buddhist—converge and overlap in their metaphysics on interrelatedness.⁵³ McFague argues that westerners think of themselves as individuals, not as a members of a community and even less of part of a planetary community. She quotes Wallace Stevens: “Nothing is itself taken alone. Things are because of interrelationships.”⁵⁴ We think of ourselves as individuals and need to develop an ecological literacy realizing that everything is related to everything else. We need to comprehend ourselves as part of the “web of life, an incredibly vast, complex, subtle, beautiful web that would both amaze us and can call forth our concern.”⁵⁵ Ecological unity of ourselves, life, and the Earth is not mere interpretation but what science describes as ‘interrelatedness.’

Thich Nhat Hanh affirms that

We human beings have always singled ourselves out from the rest of the natural world. We classify other animals and living beings as “nature,” a thing apart from us, and we act as if we’re somehow separate from it....Human beings and nature are inseparable.⁵⁶

To practice mindfulness meditation we look deeply into the nature of things is to discover their true nature, the nature of interbeing. According to Buddhism, we inter-are

⁵³ Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, World, and Global Warming*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2008. Thich Nhat Hanh, *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Ecology and Peace*, Berkeley, Parallax Press, 2008.

⁵⁴ McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*, 47.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 52.

⁵⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The World We Have*, loc. 301.

with the suffering of people, animals, and the Earth. Both Thich Nhat Hanh and Sallies McFague ground religious responses to climate change and the suffering of people, life, and the Earth to our interrelatedness, not any anthropocentric privileging of humanity or separating ourselves from nature.

Queering Ecology: “Against Nature”

Many LGBT theological and biblical scholars have been compelled by the Pauline use of nature (*physis*) in Romans 1:26 and the subsequent apologetics to argue the naturalness of same-sex relations.⁵⁷ The “sin against nature” has been a touchstone in the debate on what is natural and what is unnatural in sexual practices and with whom we might engage in natural sex. It has been subjected to a specious natural law philosophies and theologies grounded in Stoicism and Christian erotophobia and somatophobia. Such views based on nature seem to define the purpose of sex as procreative only or limited to the so-called “plumbing theory” that male and female parts fit (“penis into a vagina”). I standby over the years the conclusion of the historian of medieval Christianity and sex, James Brundage: “What is natural often means whatever is thought of to be the usual practice of the majority.”⁵⁸ Christian moralists have refined and expanded their language of natural sexuality to include

⁵⁷ For example: see some of my favorite scholarly sodomologists: William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, & Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament*. (2nd edition) , Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress Press, 2007; Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticsim in the Biblical World*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress Press, 1988; Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997. Mark D. Jordan, *The Ethics of Sex*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2002, especially 76-106.

⁵⁸ Robert Goss, *Jesus ACTED UP*, 117. From James Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, 7. Further discussion: Goss, *Jesus ACTED UP*, 115-118.

biological/psychological/gender complementarity while the crude Christian fundamentalist still use the language of the “sin against nature” to stress the moral depravity and severity of same-gender sex. No new and, I might add, cogent arguments have been added to the discourse of natural sexuality as it has been morphed into the rhetoric of the traditional “naturalness” of one man, one woman marriage by National Organization of Marriage and the opponents of Marriage Equality in the US federal courts.

“Against nature” has been the rallying interpretation of religious, cultural, psychological, scientific, economic and political institutions. These institutions have formed power meta-narratives, often intersecting with each other, to preserve the dominance of cultural heterosexism. I make a bold claim that will take more than few pages devoted to the topic here: Against nature and the natural have been conceptual categories to wage a cultural war of dominance against same-gender sex, women, peoples of color, indigenous peoples, animals and the Earth herself. As Jeffrey Weeks writes,

...appeals to nature, to the claims of the natural, are among the most potent we can make. They place us in a world of apparent fixity and truth. They appear to tell us what and who we are, and where we are going. They seem to tell us the truth.⁵⁹

Brundage’s insight about the deployment of the category of “natural” complements Week’s claim that natural places us in a world of fixity and truth while amending Brundage’s claim by adding that the natural is “the usual practice of the *heterosexual or dominant majority*.”

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Weeks, *Against Nature: Essays on History, Sexuality, and Identity*, London, River Oram Press, 1991, 87.

“Against nature” and “natural” are very instable categories of male, heteronormative dominance rhetorically deployed against particular marginalized groups. Queer and feminist theologians have discovered that as they deconstruct the nature/unnatural paradigm is nothing other than the narrow procreative ethic of heterosexism. Feminists realize that such an ethic attempts to regulate female bodies, procreative choices over their bodies and sexuality. The recent Republican and conservative Christian campaign against women receiving insurance coverage for reproductive choices underscores their rhetorical attempts to control women bodies and a cultural wish to restrain and relegate women back to a sphere of compulsory motherhood. On the one hand, from a queer perspective, we learn that the dominant vocal culture charges queers with transgressing the natural order of sexuality and marriage. Queer sexuality is required to obey and comply the dominant paradigm of compulsory heterosexuality and marriage understood as naturally heterosexual.

One of the most interesting challenges to the stability and fixity of natural/unnatural category comes with the exploration of animal sex/gender system. The publication of Bruce Bagemihl’s *Biological Exuberance* and Paul Vasey & Volker Sommer’s *Homosexual Behavior in Animals* have underscored the blinders of heterosexist scientists to the queer multiplicities of non-heterosexual sexualities and gender diversities in the animal realm.⁶⁰ Joan Roughgarden, a transgender woman and

⁶⁰ Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1999; Paul Vasey & Volker Sommer (eds) *Homosexual Behavior in Animals: An Evolutionary Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

ecologist, discovered gender diversities in animals within nature.⁶¹ In review of Rougharden's book, Duane Jeffrey summarizes that "nature's inventiveness far outruns our meager ability to categorize."⁶² It was a very easy transition for myself to realize that the real sin against nature is what humanity has performed to exploit nature, the climate deniers, and the apathy of Christian leaders to speak about climate change.

Challenges Before Us

Climate change has many parallels to the early phases of HIV/AIDS: public denial, the short-sightedness of many in Congress trying to curtail EPA regulations of carbon emissions by coal plants, the deafening silence from many quarters, the stigmatizing of green activists, corporate profiteering and greed, the callousness for life, and the fragility of hope of climate activists in face of the inevitable present and future climate impact.

To my LGTBQI sisters and brothers and not-identified and heterosexual allies, I invite you to journey with myself and others to take your academic talents and theological, biblical, ethical, and philosophical strategies that you have learned during the AIDS pandemic, with the emergence of queer theologies, and the apologetic debates in the cultural wars on sexualities and gender fluidities, to apply to fighting for Earthcare and other life. Join me in Viriditas, "greening"-- a term coined by Hildegard of Bingen, in

⁶¹ Joan Rougharden, *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender and Sexuality in Nature and People*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004.

⁶² Duane Jeffrey, Review of Joan Rougharden's *Evolution's Rainbow* in: *Politics and the Life Sciences*, (10) November, 2005, 72. .

“Greening Grace of Creation.” Transition from queer to green, and then unite queer and greening in the most important battle for life.

Human kind cannot bear very much reality. T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*.

East Coker

I have been frustrated with the lack of movement on environmental justice or greening of MCC churches. There has been recalcitrance within the leadership to engage the issues about climate change or even to speak about them from the pulpit.