

2014

The Stories Behind the Story (Foreword and Introduction to Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology: Foundations in Scripture, Theology, History, and Praxis)

Daniel L. Brunner

George Fox University, dbrunner@georgefox.edu

Jennifer L. Butler

A.J. Swoboda

George Fox University, aswoboda@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gfes>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brunner, Daniel L.; Butler, Jennifer L.; and Swoboda, A.J., "The Stories Behind the Story (Foreword and Introduction to Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology: Foundations in Scripture, Theology, History, and Praxis)" (2014). *Faculty Publications - Portland Seminary*. 93.
<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gfes/93>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Portland Seminary at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Portland Seminary by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.



BAKER PUBLISHING GROUP

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, photocopied, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, audio recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

INTRODUCING
**Evangelical
Ecotheology**

**Foundations
in Scripture, Theology,
History, and Praxis**

•

Daniel L. Brunner,
Jennifer L. Butler,
and A. J. Swoboda


Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

© 2014 by Daniel L. Brunner, Jennifer L. Butler, and A. J. Swoboda

Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file
at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Brunner, Daniel L.

Introducing evangelical ecotheology : foundations in scripture, theology, history, and praxis
/ Daniel L. Brunner, Jennifer L. Butler, and A. J. Swoboda.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8010-4965-1 (pbk.)

1. Ecotheology. 2. Evangelicalism. I. Brunner, Daniel L. II. Butler, Jennifer L., 1981–

III. Swoboda, A. J., 1981– IV. Title.

BT695.5.B775 2014

261.8'8—dc23

2014020075

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled Message are from *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson, copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations labeled NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations labeled NLT are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
19 23 15 2 15 4 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



To Kenley, Dylan, Elliot, and Moses

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Contents

Foreword by Bill McKibben ix

Part I Why Ecotheology?

- 1 Introduction: The Stories behind the Story 3
 - Our Stories
 - The Structure of This Book
- 2 In the Beginning: Listening to the Voice of Scripture 15
 - The Problem
 - God's Two Books
 - Biblical Reasons for Creation Care
- 3 The Voice of Creation: The Grandeur and the Groaning of the Earth 35
 - The Grandeur of Creation
 - The Scientist as Prophet
 - The Groaning of Creation

Part II Exploring Ecotheology

- 4 Voices in the Wilderness: Christianity's History with Creation 67
 - Early Christianity
 - Eastern Orthodox Christianity
 - Western Christianity
 - The Birth of Contemporary Christian Ecotheology
- 5 The God of Burning Bushes: Trinity and Ecology 95
 - Trinity
 - Christology
 - Pneumatology

vii

- 6 Restoring Eden: Ancient Theology in an Ecological Age 117
 - Creation
 - Sin
 - Redemption and Salvation
 - Eschatology

Part III Doing Ecotheology

- 7 Breaking the Bonds: Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Lightly 145
 - Developing an Ecotheological Mind-Set
 - Ethics and Action
 - Ecojustice and Oppression
- 8 Heavenly Minded, Earthly Good: Embodying Down-to-Earth Living 177
 - Staying Rooted
 - Cultivating Awareness
 - Practicing Centering Prayer
 - Keeping the Sabbath
 - Living Simply
 - Resisting Consumerism
 - Eating Justly
 - Conserving Water
 - Reducing Waste
 - Keeping a Garden
- 9 Earthen Vessels: Greening the Church 217
 - Greening Leadership
 - Greening Land and Space
 - Greening Worship
 - Greening Mission

Part IV Last Things

- 10 Living As If: Resurrection Hope 241
 - The Journey to Hope
 - Living in Hope

Acknowledgments 253

Select Bibliography 256

Index 259

Foreword

I've been following the progress of our struggles to come to terms with our environmental struggles most of my life—when I was still in my 20s I wrote the first account for a general audience of what we then called the greenhouse effect and now call climate change. Along the way I've gotten to know a great many scientists who are using the gifts God gave them to understand our predicament; they are curious, careful, and persistent, and it's been a joy to make their acquaintance.

I've also had the pleasure of accompanying many people on various parts of their individual faith journeys, from hiking with orthodox rabbis as they made what for many was their first ascent of a mountain, to visiting with the Orthodox patriarch Bartholomew in his Turkish redoubt. A Methodist myself, I've gotten to know many Christians as they work to carry out the command that we steward the earth, and that we love our neighbors.

So far, it must be said, we're not doing as much as we need to in order to fulfill these commandments. To give just one of a thousand examples, ocean water, absorbing carbon from the atmosphere, is now 30 percent more acidic than it was just four decades ago. That is to say, our habits and lifestyles are dramatically altering the "face of the waters" described in the second verse of Genesis—and with it the ability of those ocean waters to support the small creatures at the base of the marine food chain. One could make much the same argument about Arctic ice, about spreading deserts, about deepening storms.

Changing these trends is not easy, but also not impossible. Human ingenuity has provided us with answers: solar panels and windmills, say, to replace coal and gas and oil. But the transition won't be seamless or simple, and it will require changes in our expectations and demands on the earth. That's

one reason that religious people and theological thinkers will play such an important role: they are specialists in human transformation, and in building communities that can cope with—and delight in—change for the better.

I can remember, in my days as a Sunday school teacher, the pleasure of taking the kids on hikes and watching them exult in the miraculous abundance that God has provided around us. For us adults, that exultation is shadowed by the knowledge that it will take care and commitment to safeguard Creation. But that responsibility is our glory: the commands to “keep” the beautiful place and to exercise dominion over this gift we’ve been given were our original charges after all!

Bill McKibben
May 2014

Part I

Why Ecotheology?



COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

1

Introduction

The Stories behind the Story

Nathan¹ and I (Dan) pulled into the Mbanhela community in the Gaza province of Mozambique and were greeted by the high-spirited singing of six women who form the livestock association of that small community. A Christian relief and development organization, of which Nathan is the country director, provided funds for a large chicken coop, feed, supplies, and 300 chickens for the Mbanhela community. In addition, it furnished training in basic animal husbandry and marketing. Every two months the community starts a new cycle with 320 chicks. Raising chickens for income empowers that community and helps it toward health and sustainability. But the goal of raising livestock is not just for community development. The Mbanhela community decided that God had called them to provide a home for twenty-nine orphans and other vulnerable children. (One woman, Pastor Ramira, said to us matter-of-factly, “God tells us to care for the orphans and widows, and so we do.”) Profits from the sale of the chickens help those children attend school and buy books and school supplies.

And yet Mbanhela faces many hurdles on its journey. In its first two years of operation, it lost two whole cycles of chickens, one to an abnormal heat wave and the other to the second “hundred-year” flood in thirteen years. Drought,

1. For more on Nathan’s story, see chap. 7.

floods, and irregular rains—all primarily the result of climate change—are disrupting the planting and harvesting patterns of rural farmers.² Roberto Zolho, coordinator of World Wildlife Fund in Mozambique, says that other ecological ills negatively impacting Mozambique include deforestation and species depletion through poaching.³ The nation's impoverished are burning forests at an alarmingly high rate in order to produce and sell charcoal. About 80 percent of Mozambicans use charcoal for heating and cooking. Driven by hunger, they are exchanging trees for maize. In addition Mozambique has the highest rate of illegal wildlife trade in the world, a practice connected globally to human and drug trafficking. In spite of efforts by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to protect “flagship species”—elephants, wild dogs, sea turtles, and dugong (a large marine mammal similar to a manatee)—poachers in 2012 killed over 3,500 elephants for their ivory and 680 rhinos for their horns. Poachers get \$500–\$1,000 for a rhino horn, which sells for \$65,000–\$85,000 on the black market in Asia. Corruption and issues surrounding law enforcement undermine efforts to protect the land and its biodiversity. Zolho emphasizes that ecological degradation, such as climate change, deforestation, and animal trade, is inextricably entwined with poverty. Mozambique ranks 185th out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Programme.⁴

Stories like this lie behind this book, stories of a Creation that is groaning, of Christ-followers whose discipleship increasingly involves “keeping” the Earth, and of communities like Mbanhela that live out of hope and a hunger to serve the poorest of the poor. More and more it is becoming apparent that the story of Western Christians is inescapably interconnected with Mbanhela's story, with the Creation's story, and indeed with God's story.

Our Stories

Tell me the landscape in which you live and I will tell you who you are.

—José Ortega y Gasset⁵

2. Alexander Huw Arnall, *Understanding Adaptive Capacity at the Local Level in Mozambique* (n.p.: Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance, 2012), 4.

3. Interview with Roberto Zolho, coordinator of the World Wildlife Fund Coastal East Africa Initiative, Maputo, Mozambique, June 28, 2013.

4. Khalid Malik et al., *Human Development Report 2013: Summary* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2013), 18. Out of the 26 countries on the bottom of the HDI, 24 are in Africa.

5. Cited in Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, expanded ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001 [1988]), 20.

The lifeblood of this book is our common story as a writing team. In the writing process we have tried to model the redemptive tension that community brings and the kind of hospitality, honesty, and bridge building that we hope the text itself will engender. We are two men and one woman, dedicated to mutuality, yet each with his or her own unique story and writing style. Out of a commitment to a writing process that both preserves our own unique voices and at the same time yields a readable and coherent narrative, each of us contributed something to every chapter, then each chapter was edited and woven together in community.

As authors we broach the topic of ecological theology (hereafter, eco-theology) from within evangelicalism. Each of us has evangelical roots; we secure our theology in the *euangelion* (“good news”) of Jesus Christ.⁶ David Bebbington offers a framework that best captures our understanding of “evangelical,” lifting up four marks of evangelicalism: “*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.”⁷ These qualities are explicitly woven into this book. Repeatedly in this text we voice a call to conversion, to life change, to obeying the invitation of Jesus Christ to a more encompassing discipleship. The third part of the book, on *doing* ecotheology, is pointed toward activism and expressing the gospel with our lived experiences and action. In grounding our ecotheology, we hold to the authoritative nature of Scripture and the creeds. Lastly our desire is to center our writing in Jesus Christ, recognizing that through his life, death on the cross, and resurrection God has acted definitively for the salvation and reconciliation of the world.

All of us are ordained: two (Dan and Jen) in mainline denominations, one (A. J.) in the Pentecostal/charismatic tradition. Our common call to earthkeeping is a part of our call to discipleship, and our call to discipleship is nothing more than a call to Jesus Christ. “The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heart-breaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as ‘Christians’ will become *disciples*—students, apprentices, practitioners—of *Jesus Christ*, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence,” writes the late Dallas Willard.⁸ The call to write this book arises out of our desire to respond together to Christ’s claim on our lives, to ask what Jesus might

6. Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 14–15.

7. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 3.

8. Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), xv.

want to say, and ask from us, today. Even as we share a common call to this endeavor, each of us has his or her own story to tell.

Dan Brunner

My single favorite thing as a child growing up was my tree house. When I was nine or ten years old, my dad built a platform in a large maple tree, about twelve feet in the air. Over the years I added a roof and walls. I hardly let anyone come up into that tree house, especially not my sisters. Most often I would climb the tree to get away, to breathe, to seethe, to “simmer down,” as my mom would say. One of the walls was nicely sloped, and I could bring my knees up to my chest, lean back against the sloped wall, and just sit there by myself. I loved that tree house, and I loved that maple tree. Our only pets growing up were tropical fish; that maple tree was one of my most loyal friends.

My parents were raised in the Depression. Like many of their generation, they took “conservation” to an extreme we kids considered excessive. Most of the things they did to conserve—raise a garden, drive a fuel-efficient car, not throw away anything that might one day be useful—were done predominately to save money. Yet those practices formed me.

In retrospect the single most ecologically intensive time of my life was when in my mid-thirties my family and I lived in a wilderness community called Holden Village in the North Cascades of Washington state. In this remote setting without telephone or television, we spent unrushed time in spectacular natural beauty, ate low on the food chain, worshiped daily, studied spirituality and discipleship, kept Sabbath, and lived a simplified rhythm of life. Most importantly, gifted teachers led our small community in intentional dialogue about ecology and the state of the planet. Never before had I spent such focused time on such a vital issue with such well-informed and passionate people.

Like my coauthors, I have favorite places in the glory of God’s Creation: the coastline and Cascades in my home state of Oregon, Tuolumne Meadows and Half Dome in Yosemite, the Dungeness Spit and Lake Chelan in Washington state, the Black Forest and Bavarian Alps in Germany, Iona and Loch Ness in Scotland, and Betws-y-Coed and Snowdonia in Wales. On the other hand, I have encountered large-scale environmental degradation. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, I saw the widespread ecological fallout—air and water pollution, acid rain, etc.—of a burgeoning chemical industry in Halle (Saale), East Germany. In Burundi I witnessed the crushing effects of deforestation, land degradation, and soil erosion on rural peoples in the upcountry.

In 2010 a long-term dream came to fruition when my colleagues and I launched the Christian Earthkeeping (CEK) program at our seminary (George

Fox Evangelical Seminary).⁹ For nearly a year beforehand a small group of dedicated students and I hammered out the vision and framework of the program. Its mission is to form evangelical leaders who cultivate the care of Creation in their communities. Our rationale for the program can be summarized simply:

- The Earth is endangered.
- The church, and in particular the evangelical church, has by and large been silent.
- The Bible speaks to our relationship with the created order.
- The church must respond to God's command to "keep" the earth (Gen. 2:15).
- Christian leaders need a theological and biblical basis for earthkeeping.

Students are exposed to a broad spectrum of authors, experts, and practitioners as we engage theological reflection, spiritual disciplines, and intentional praxis.¹⁰ As much as anything, this book arises out of the community of learning at our seminary, out of the students—including my two coauthors—who have poured themselves into what it means to be a follower of Christ and a loving caretaker of Creation.

I am a lifelong Lutheran; my father and mother were lifelong Lutherans. Our home was rooted in an evangelical, pietistic spirituality, something for which I remain grateful. Today I am an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, teaching full time at an evangelical seminary with Wesleyan Holiness and Quaker roots. My prayer is that this book will be a small part of building ecotheological bridges in a spirit of hospitality and grace.

Jennifer Butler

My grandmother is a birder. For as long as I can remember, she's kept a pocket-sized red Audubon guide and a pair of binoculars by her rocker. When I was a child she exclaimed: "Jennifer! Come look at this!" I obliged her, peering through the binoculars to get a closer look at common Ruby-crowned Kinglets

9. For more on the program, see the description at George Fox Evangelical Seminary, Christian Earthkeeping Concentration, <http://www.georgefox.edu/seminary/programs/christian-earthkeeping/index.html> (accessed July 27, 2013). A two-year, 12-credit CEK concentration includes two yearlong seminars ("Theology and Stewardship of Creation" and "Eschatology, New Creation, and Communal Ethics") and two summer immersion intensives ("Theology and Ethics of the Land" and "Poverty and Restorative Earthkeeping").

10. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter, *OED*), "praxis, n.," defines praxis as "the practice or exercise of a technical subject or art, as distinct from the theory of it." Praxis arises from theology, or, as we will see, can transform our theology. Ecopraxis embodies ecotheology.

and Black-capped Chickadees. Inwardly I groaned, making oaths never to turn into a crazy old bird-watcher. Today if I had an icon, it would be some kind of bird, maybe the Vesper Sparrow, whose song has so often carried me to sleep and greeted me in the morning.

I don't remember the moment it happened, but one day I looked up and noticed birds everywhere. I spent a summer watching baby birds hatch outside my bedroom window. I spent one spring pilgrimaging to where swifts formed a great funnel and descended from the sky in a furious dive toward the brick chimney of a deserted movie theater.

These days I escape down a country road that dead-ends in front of a farmhouse. There are alfalfa fields on either side, and in the winter, when the grass has been harvested, a flock of sheep roam and cats prowl for rodents. I go there for the birds. A Great Blue Heron stalks the field—reminding me of a tall old man, torso and shoulders hunched from age and covered by a bluish tweed suit jacket, holding his hands together behind his back as he takes slow, deliberate steps.

Once, I found an injured juvenile Red-tailed Hawk on the side of the road. It moved almost gratefully, willingly, into a cardboard box and sat silently in the backseat of my car, head rotating ever so slowly from side to side, its great, glassy eyes blinking as we drove in silence to the wildlife rehabilitation center.

I have observed strange sights: fat robins pecking at the ground when spring is nowhere near; enormous formations of geese flying south as late as midwinter; and seagulls that just appeared one day—in a wet, frosty grass seed field (far from the ocean) standing in icy little streams as though they'd found the sea. I don't know what they were doing there, but every time I drove by, I couldn't help thinking they were canaries in the coal mine—our early warning system, showing up in places they ought not to be at times that were ominously curious.

Each sighting—even strange and foreboding ones—enchants me. To be honest, I like the sparrows best, and the wrens. Common birds remind me of the places I come from—the lakes of Northern Idaho, the fields of Eastern Washington, and the Blue Range of Northeastern Oregon.

I've been running away from myself and my history for a long time, but the truth about who I am and where I come from shows up in what I can no longer help noticing: birds in flight, the way my hands look identical to my mother's when I'm digging in the garden, and the way I feel most like myself when I'm walking in silence down that quiet, country road.

I used to be embarrassed of the landscape I grew up in—miles away from a library or a grocery store, chores that involved pulling weeds and picking berries, reading *Little Women* instead of *Seventeen* magazine. I spent a long time trying to forget growing up as an evangelical in rural America. I finally began to know something about who I was around the same time I noticed the birds.

I am a minister in the United Church of Christ. I care about women and the loss of wild spaces. I am a political idealist. I accept the science that tells us we're facing a human-made apocalypse. I take Scripture seriously but not always literally. And I am an evangelical. I believe in the message of the gospel, in personal relationship with Christ. The people I cherish most believe in a literal, seven-day creation and are suspicious of science and politicians. I've lived with communities losing their local identities once Walmart came to town, and I've experienced deliverance when Walmart provided desperately needed jobs to unemployed loggers. I know what it's like when a rancher loses half his herd to wolves protected by the law. I had friends who never went to college because they spent their afternoons and weekends baling hay and driving a combine.

Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by the awkwardness, but more often I am convinced that this balancing act is home—exactly where I am meant to be. This book is part of that awkward rooting—a commitment to bringing my two worlds closer.

I am the granddaughter of Virginia Grace, watcher of birds; the daughter of Robert Lee, blue-collar worker, card-carrying Republican; and Karen Lee, stay-at-home mother, gardener, and born-again Baptist. I grew up in pickup trucks, tagged along on hunting trips, and worked at Walmart as a teenager. And somehow, perhaps through divine intervention, I have become a witness to wonder—an amateur bird-watcher.

A. J. Swoboda

We're all born into great debt, I suppose. Our clothes, our food, and our fingerprints are all handed to us. Words are no different. We're borrowers. My parents afforded me my experience of God's Creation long before memory kicked into gear: walks through Oregon forests, the gathering of leaf piles, a love for roses. I guess, in a way, I've borrowed my love for the Earth from someone else too: the One who made it.

During childhood, summers always meant Montana. The pilgrimage—which brought me from Oregon, and my father from New Mexico, to Billings, Montana, where my grandfather lived—ended somewhere up a windy canyon road along the Boulder River. There a dainty, dusty cabin awaited us fit with a small kitchen and a perpetually half-ripped fly net. It was perfect. The Boulder was our shared religion. With liturgical predictability, we three Swoboda men would awake at five o'clock in the morning to watch the sun, the trout, and our expectations rise. And with each scaly resurrection above the tombs of the rushing water, we knew a long day of work was before us.

Grandpa Rudy was a master fly-fisherman and a World War II vet. Just like God, he could make flies. Raised by the ancients, Rudy knew not just

where the fish *were* but how they *thought*. He had a trout-like mind. I recall the texture of his wrinkled hands as he helped me place a fresh handmade fly on my line when I'd lost one on a snag below. Then there was my old man, a courageous and bold child of the sixties. He'd waded into deep waters only, at times, to be overwhelmed by the torrent. Grandpa rolled his eyes. A lot. But we were all together. To be careful, I'd remain in the safe liminality between the two, casting my net into the cold Montana waters. Those trips were magical, transfixed in time. The smell of the river, the sound of the rocks, and the color of the sky made it feel as though God were peeking over the mountains' edge just to see what was happening.

My grandpa died just hours after he put my twenty-fifth birthday card in the mail. After the funeral, I read it. He'd signed it, "Grandson, I love you. Keep your health. Love, Rudy." With my grandfather's end came an end to our yearly pilgrimages. My father and I still talk about the Boulder and how Grandpa taught us the way of fish and how he's probably still rolling his eyes. In a way, the Boulder made us one: three generations of men, one a World War II soldier, another a doctor, and another a confused young man. We were that river. And we always will be.

I became a Christian as a sophomore in high school and then joined a Pentecostal church. My earliest encounter with Pentecostalism was reading cursorily about Pentecostals in the Appalachian Mountains who audaciously drank poison and handled snakes.¹¹ Needless to say, this was a peculiar (yet stimulating) introduction to Pentecostalism. Later, in college, I attended a Pentecostal ministry on campus and soon became its pastor. Along the way, I came to believe that Pentecostalism and Creation care were not incompatible. In fact Pentecostals love the same Spirit that hovers over Creation. It hovers over us. And seeks to reconcile us.

I write because change is imperative. Without question change is needed within my Pentecostal/charismatic family, which has often been caricatured as having nothing to contribute to the ecological conversation. There's some truth to that. In some ways my heritage has canonized a harmful theological mind-set that not only perpetuates but encourages destruction of the Earth in order to usher in Christ's return. Yet, along the way, I've come to believe that Pentecostal communities can both contribute to and offer hope within this crisis. Notably the founder of Earth Day was a Pentecostal.¹²

11. Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain* (New York: Penguin, 1995).

12. John McConnell Jr., the originator of Earth Day and son of founding members of the Assemblies of God, believed that Earth Day was an opportunity to "show the power of prayer, the validity of their charity and their practical concern for Earth's life and people." Darrin J. Rodgers, "Pentecostal Origins of Earth Day," Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center website, <http://ifphc.wordpress.com/2010/04/22/pentecostal-origins-of-earth-day/>.

We're borrowers of this land, not owners. I've always known the God of the stream. Now I know the God of the home, the classroom, the church, and the Bible. But it's the same God. My father and I still visit the Boulder. Not as much, though. Now I have a son too. And there will be a moment, somewhere down the river's flow, when we will take him to the cabin; he'll smell the river, see my father's wrinkly hands, and watch his own dad learn how to swim a river. *His* grandpa will roll his eyes too. There the rocks will shout, leaves will meander down the river, and God, by grace, will peek over the mountains.

The Structure of This Book

The reconstruction of worldviews and the redirection of praxis and spiritual life are all required in meeting the long cycle of decline that contributed to the present state of ecological systems.

—Anne Marie Dalton and Henry C. Simmons¹³

Jürgen Moltmann describes a major component to the process of how his theology developed after his conversion to Christ as a German soldier in a World War II allied prison camp. He terms his work a “theology of the way,” or *theologia viatorum*. This kind of theology “emerged only as I walked it.”¹⁴ Like a walk in the woods or a hike up a mountain, this book has unfolded as we have walked with it. Its structure corresponds to a core assumption we bring to our writing: that theology and practice must go hand in hand.

Outline: Theology and Practice

This book is structured as three main sections (with a final, short section): part I—“Why Ecotheology?”; part II—“Exploring Ecotheology”; and part III—“Doing Ecotheology.” It is important to note the rationale behind the book's structure. Parts I and II *explore* methodology, biblical foundations, ecological realities, historical roots, and central theological concepts for building a Christian ecotheology. Part III, then, is dedicated to moving from academic reflection to concrete action. In the West, with our privileged, intellectualized, and compartmentalized lives, theorizing and theologizing can become ends in themselves. Therefore we advocate *doing* ecotheology. Social psychologist David Myers writes, “We are as likely to act ourselves into a way of thinking as to think ourselves into action. Not only do we often stand up for what we believe, we also come to

13. Anne Marie Dalton and Henry C. Simmons, *Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 70.

14. Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), xv.

believe more strongly in what we have stood up for.”¹⁵ Regular ecological practices (like drying laundry on a line, gardening, composting, living in community, commuting by bicycle, etc.) are capable of transforming our theology and ethic as we do them. Our actions not only give evidence of a caring relationship with the planet but also shape our loves, affections, and desires. Doing ecotheology may be the truest way to a conversion of both mind and lifestyle. Orthodoxy can lead to orthopraxy, but orthopraxy can also lead to orthodoxy.

Part I (chaps. 1–3) establishes the rationale for our endeavor. In this first chapter we share some of the stories that underlie the work and provide a general overview of this book’s structure and how it can be used. In chapter 2 we discuss the complex problems we faced in this project; our basic methodology, especially as it relates to Scripture and our biblical hermeneutic; and core biblical reasons for caring for the Earth. In chapter 3 we examine the grandeur of God’s Creation and provide an overview of its groaning, of some of the symptoms of ecological degradation.

Part II delves into an array of historical and theological considerations for a Christian ecotheology. Chapter 4 provides an overview of Christianity’s “ecological” heritage. History helps us understand how we might think and live in our historical moment. Theology forms the content of chapters 5 and 6. In chapter 5 we consider how our understanding of the Trinity, Christology, and pneumatology lays the groundwork for a Christian ecotheology. Following that, in chapter 6, we dive into the doctrines of creation, sin, salvation and redemption, and eschatology.

In part III we strive to bring our history and theology down to earth by considering how individual Christians and the church might live them out in the twenty-first century. Chapter 7 establishes the foundation of ecological practice by exploring key characteristics of an ecological mind-set and the broad vision of ecojustice. The next two chapters revolve around ecological practice (hereafter, *ecopraxis*), first by looking at our lifestyles as individual Christ-followers (chap. 8) and then by offering concrete ways of “greening” the church (chap. 9). Finally, in part IV (chap. 10) we reflect on how we live as people of resurrection hope in a broken and hurting world. At the conclusion of the text we provide a bibliography to make the reader aware of further resources available.

A Word about Words

In writing this book, we had to make a few decisions about language.¹⁶ We have chosen to use inclusive language for God and people; however, we have

15. David G. Myers, *The American Paradox* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 285.

16. Other than those listed here, most words and concepts are defined in the text itself.

not altered historic documents, direct quotations, or the biblical text (we have used the New Revised Standard Version). We believe that gendered language for God is complex and carries with it a history of neglect. At the same time, we know that human language fails when speaking of the Holy. What we are left with are words and metaphors, whether that imagery speaks of God in human ways (mother, father, friend, comforter) or other-than-human ways (light, dove, rock, water). Whatever language we choose proves problematic, so we ask for grace from the reader as we enter into the fraught, yet holy, task of describing God.

We will use both “earth” and “Earth” (or “Creation”). The word “earth” refers to the land, water, soil, and atmosphere of our planet—the ground beneath our feet and the air we breathe. When we capitalize “Earth” (or “Creation”) we are aiming to include all living creatures (including humans) and emphasizing the interconnected nature of the created community. The household (Gr. *oikos*, from which the word “ecology” derives) of Earth encompasses all scales—planetary, bioregional, ecosystemic, human, and microbial—as necessary and related components of the broad community of life. While we understand that humanity is part of the natural world, our use of “nature” or “natural world” is primarily in reference to the other-than-human part of Creation.

Using This Book in the Classroom

We are educators who believe in the power of education. The word “education” derives from the Latin roots *e* (“out”) and *ducare* (“to lead”). Both Exodus and education are primarily about the same thing: God’s people being “led out” from the Egypt of slavery and the Egypt of ignorance. Education, like wandering in the desert, can be painful, burdensome, and confusing. Education creates new problems. It deconstructs in order to reconstruct. Years ago Paulo Freire asserted that the goal of education was not transferring information or sermonizing but “conscientization,” through which people carefully reexamine injustice in order to take just action.¹⁷ Good education is proven by a changed world. This book assumes that teaching and learning are about the conscientization to what is going on with God’s Creation and taking steps to deal with it.

Our hope is that this book will open up ways for every reader—whether in undergraduate, graduate, seminary, or church settings—to bring his or her own experiences and beliefs to the conversation. Over the course of formal

17. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniv. ed., trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 119.

education, students will scour, dissect, and mine hundreds of texts and lectures, but the “texts” that will leave the greatest impression on the trajectory of their future are those of real people who do real life, who teach what they have learned in their doing. People learn best from people who are actually doing the material. We are aware that the nature of this content often creates problems and questions. We recommend making adequate space for disagreements as they arise.

We have written this book in community; we have disagreed, argued, cried, laughed, and reconciled over and over again in coffee shops, on planes, in hotel lobbies, and in Google hangouts. Some of those debates did not make the book. Others, however, have. Throughout this book there are intermittent boxes we have named “Tension Points.” These boxes illustrate some of the challenges we had in finding commonality and agreement around certain issues. While the tension points represent our differences, our broader commitment to hold hospitable space for dialogue exemplifies our overarching responsibility to each other and this work.

We encourage creativity in going through the content of this book. Contemplate, dream, and discover unique ways of exploring *and* doing ecotheology. For instance:

- Hold a class outside—Connect learning about God’s Creation by being in God’s Creation.
- Schedule a praxis day—As part of a class exercise, do something that was discussed in the classroom. Go pick up garbage. Carpool to class one day.
- Engage in a class project—Discover a useful way for the whole class to do a project. One idea would be to start a recycling program over the course of the semester.



We hope that in reading and engaging this text, whether alone or in learning communities, people will discover how vitally interconnected their stories are to the Earth’s story, to the stories of places like Mbanhela and Mozambique, to the church’s story, and to Christ’s story.