

The Second Coming? Existential Reality of Global Environmental Crisis

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My friend the late Very Rev. James R. Morton, Dean of the cathedral of St John the Divine in New York City declared that “Ecology is the science of the body of Christ through which we of the earth community learn our sacred connections.”

These sacred connections, long recognized in native American Indian culture, have been broken, and which the Climate and Extinction crises affirm. From a Christian mystical tradition when we empathize deeply with the natural world, we receive the stigmata of an Earth crucified.

At least one scientist acknowledged these kinds of wounds. The late Aldo Leopold, a former government wolf exterminator who became America’s leading conservationist and natural philosopher, wrote “One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise.”

But now a more ecologically-aware public, especially the youth, are suffering those wounds and without some direct action or other solution-seeking outlet feel despair, helplessness and hopelessness. Climate grief and other terms are being applied to people of all ages and from different cultures who are suffering emotionally from experiencing and knowing about the harmful consequences of climate change, many mourning the demise of other species more immediately harmed than most people, those in coastal, island and poorer communities being especially vulnerable.

(See <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/03/mental-health-climate.pdf>).

Young people in many countries are now rising in protest, fearing for their future which will never be secure until all nation states and political and religious leaders embrace *equalitarianism*, the antidote to anthropocentrism, by giving equal and fair consideration to all living beings. This is the justice and compassion-based foundation of ONE HEALTH, of a sustainable economy, a healthy environment, (the good of the Commons), world peace and the common good. The Climate crisis exacerbates the Extinction crisis and vice versa all exacerbated by overpopulation and overconsumption, the loss of species, biodiversity and wild lands being the wounds also of those who care as well as being harmful to our health, air and water quality, food and economic security.

Christianity’s Second Coming, from the perspectives of evolutionary biology and transformative psychology, can be seen in what St. Francis of Assisi called our Second Birth, awakening spiritually to the existential reality of the human condition which we are not powerless to address and heal, along with responsibility for “all our relations”. Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin called this the Omega point of Christogenesis in human evolution, noting over half a century ago that “The day is not far distant when humanity will realize that biologically it is faced with a choice between suicide and adoration.”

This realization is the apotheosis of the Vision Quest of native American Indian tradition, a rite of passage and initiation from egocentric adolescence into mature, eco-centric responsibility for other sentient beings, plant and animal in the life community: All our relations indeed. We humans, like all other sentient life forms, are spiritual beings experiencing life in one particular form or another which makes up our Life Community wherein we share so much with other species, from joy and suffering to fear

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and revelation. This realization extends the Christian doctrine of “treating thy neighbor as thyself” to the non-human members of our communities. This is the essence of the Golden Rule, a core principle in the world’s major religions which is ultimately enlightened self-interest.

As a life unexamined is a life un-lived, so is a culture where its ethics and morality are not examined and confronted when there are transgressions of the Covenant of Planetary Stewardship: To “dress and to keep” the Garden of Eden. The story of Adam in the Garden of Eden on Earth, in the Quran, is an object lesson in the cruciality to establish harmonious interrelationship between human design/constructs in nature, which must be a part of, and not apart from, natural design based on the balance of nature (*al-mizan*) that is originated by a totally non-anthropomorphic creator according to Nadeem Haque (*Ecolibrium: The Sacred Balance in Islam* by Nadeem Haque, Al-Hafiz B.A. Masri and Mehran Banaei, Beacon Books, U.K., in press 2021). These authors argue passionately that this can best be achieved through practical and realistic actions that preserve this sacred balance.

The youth of today are experiencing such an awakening which may be ignited by fear but can only be sustained by loving concern for all of Earth’s creation; and respect and justice for all beings. Fear and anger, prejudice and hatred, once caringly and courageously faced and informed, can become moral outrage and right action to apply the Golden Rule to all our relations and relationships. We must all confront the moral inversion of the Golden Rule by mammonists/materialists for whom the rule of gold many believe is their savior. It promises to make money come their way, at least for a while, by giving people jobs in extractive and polluting industries; corporate slavery indeed down in the mines and third world manufacturing industries. Others see all of this as the working of the anti-Christ, but when confronted by the facts, the environmental costs, the harm to Nature as well as to the health and welfare of their workers, they are anti-science and anti-reason. To commit crimes against Nature, humankind and animal kind call for the establishment of a United Environmental Nations to address and which the World Trade Organization and other international organizations have for too long ignored. As Albert Schweitzer advised, “Until we extend our circle of compassion to all living things, humanity will not find peace”.

Reflecting on the following poem may help us all see the spiritual nature of the existential crisis we, fellow creatures and planet Mother Earth face today:

The **Second Coming**” is a poem written by Irish poet [W. B. Yeats](#) in [1919](#) after World War 1.

“Turning and turning in the widening [gyre](#)
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.”

“Surely some [revelation](#) is at hand;
Surely the [Second Coming](#) is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of [Spiritus Mundi](#)**
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with [lion body and the head of a man](#),
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,

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Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards [Bethlehem](#) to be born?"

Our redemption, recovery of our humanity and ultimate well-being are in large part through our renunciation of a culture and economy of harm. Such liberating redemption is at the core of all the world's religions and secular humanism when shorn of politics and human-centeredness. Reverential respect for all our non-human relations is long overdue and ultimately, enlightened self-interest.

To walk in Grace and Peace is devoutly to be wished. This is possible through right action that comes from the right-mindedness of an open heart, the core principle of Buddhism and Hinduism's *ahimsa*, of non-harming. Yet it is ironic that in India's proclaimed "largest democracy in the world," casteism is as alive and well as racism in the U.S., China and many other countries.

Walking on Grace and Peace is possible when those who have the means to live simply, do so, so that others may simply live; and when they dedicate their lives to serve the common good and the good of the Commons. If *Homo sapiens* continues to multiply and over-consume, wars, droughts, famines and pandemics will be the fate of future generations living on an increasingly defiled, depleted and toxic planet Earth and be victims and witnesses to Nature's nemesis.

Of the soon-to-be 8 billion human population, already at least **79.5** million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes. Among them are nearly 26 million refugees, around half of whom are under the age of 18. ([Figures at a Glance – UNHCR www.unhcr.org › en-us › figures-at-a-glance](#)). According to Action Against Hunger, "Around the world, more than enough food is produced to feed the global population—but more than **690** million people still go hungry.[4] After steadily declining for a decade, world hunger is on the rise, affecting 8.9 percent of people globally. From 2018 to 2019, the number of undernourished people grew by 10 million, and there are nearly 60 million more undernourished people now than in 2014.5" (<https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/world-hunger-facts-statistics>) These issues were considered by the U.S. Government back in 1974 but clearly, the science-based predictions and best intentions did not get very far. (See National Security Study Memorandum NSSM 200. Implications of Worldwide Population Growth For U.S. Security and Overseas Interests (The Kissinger Report) December 10, 1974. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Security_Study_Memorandum_200).

Nature's correctives, from extreme climatic events and population-and economy-decimating pandemics, like the current COVID-19 pandemic, will wane when over-consumers feel some shame and pain. We are all responsible for the fate of the Earth and each other's destiny. For St. Francis of Assisi it was through extending Christian charity, compassion and love, agape', not only to the poor and needy but to all creatures great and small. He was spiritually inspired by the birds, butterflies and deer in the forests and glades around Assisi, created in the light and glory their existential presence revealed in his communion with them: When he entered that light he became part of it. Illumed. Jewish philosopher Martin Buber intimates this in what he called the *I-Thou* experience St Francis is the embodiment of Christian charity---the antithesis of America's 'Jesus Saved' White Supremacists—for he had seen the Light, became it and lived his truth for life's sake. As G.K. Chesterton quipped, "The problem with Christianity is not that it

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has been tried and found wanting, but that it has been found difficult and left untried.” St Francis of Assisi, the Catholic’s Patron Saint of the Environment, was one exception who tried and demonstrated, teaching benevolence, humility and loving kindness toward all beings---the Buddha’s *maitri*, loving kindness being what Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, called the true religion. Both gathered with kindred followers to pray and celebrate the glory and wonder of Nature and all her creatures and creations, many being healed in spirit, mind and body in the process. Both saw the trees as making temples and shrines and eschewed the virtual ones of Church, Temple and Synagogue, all gold and shining inside but not giving out, sheltering the poor. Christians recall the Biblical story of Lazarus the beggar, covered in the rotting sores of leprosy,” Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man’s table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores”.(<https://biblehub.com/nlt/luke/16.htm>). The dogs showed more compassion than the rich man, and their saliva can heal. Albert Schweitzer, echoing Buddha, declared “Any religion or philosophy which is not based on a respect for life is not a true religion or philosophy.”

To walk in grace and peace is possible and as a veterinarian I see the first steps coming as more people are choosing plant-based diets, those with more education, food-availability, employment security, many having fewer or no children or electing to adopt. These steps will help transform the business world. We only have one Earth, one economy and one health since all things are connected and these connections must be restored and protected for the good of all.

**The world soul (Latin:: anima mundi) is, according to several systems of thought, an intrinsic connection between all living things on the planet, which relates to the world in much the same way as the soul is connected to the human body Therefore, we may consequently state that: this world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence ... a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related.

The author is a veterinarian and author of several books including *Animals and Nature First. The Boundless Circle: Caring for Creatures and Creation*. Also, *Bringing Life to Ethics: Global Bioethics for a Humane Society* published by State University of New York Press. Website www.drfoxonehealth.com