

DOING GOD'S WORK:

Conservation & Faith Communities

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THE MAIN IDEA:

These folks share...



...her values...



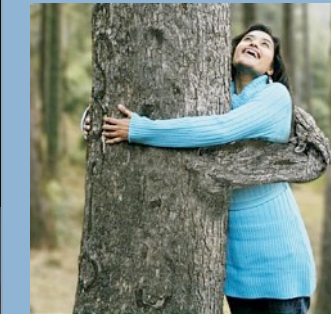
...and feel the same call to action...so let's work together!

WHY DO WE VALUE SPECIAL PLACES?

WHY DOES SHE HUG THAT TREE?



Communion



HOW DO CONSERVATIONISTS DESCRIBE “COMMUNION”? ALDO LEOPOLD:

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a *community* of interdependent parts...the land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the *community* to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or, collectively, the land. (emphasis added)

--from “The Land Ethic”

When we see land as a *community* to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. (emphasis added)

--from *A Sand County Almanac*



HOW DO CONSERVATIONISTS DESCRIBE “COMMUNION”? JOHN MUIR:

As soon as we take one thing by itself, we find it hitched to everything in the universe.

--from his *Journals*

No synonym for God is so perfect as Beauty. Whether as seen carving the lines of the mountains with glaciers, or gathering matter into stars, or planning the movements of waters, or gardening—still all is beauty.

--from the January 1869 *Atlantic Monthly*



HOW DO CONSERVATIONISTS DESCRIBE “COMMUNION”? HENRY DAVID THOREAU:

This is a delicious evening,
when the whole body is
one sense, and imbibes
delight through every pore.
I go and come with a
strange liberty in Nature, a
part of herself.

--from *Walden*



THE NEXUS OF RELIGION AND CONSERVATION:

No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it. In our attempt to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial.

--Also Leopold, "The Land Ethic"



THE PROS AND CONS OF RELIGIONS FOR CONSERVATION:

Religions can be:

- Focused on personal salvation
- Focused on the “other worldly”
- Eclipsed by “science”
- Dogmatic and intolerant
- The source of wars



Religions can be:

- Focused on community
- Focused on God present in this world
- Informed by “science”
- Ecumenical
- Peacemakers



WHY RELIGION?

BEING PART OF SOMETHING BEYOND OURSELVES

- Explain the world
- Protect us from harm
- Deal with life's problems
- Share in a spiritual life
- Gain eternal life



HOW RELIGION CAN FAIL CONSERVATION BY BECOMING DIS-INTEGRATED

Four faces of religion to the world (“nature”):

- Sacramental: using the world to glimpse mystery
- Mystic: looking *beyond* world to “unity”
- Reserved: admitting no worldly image is adequate
- Active: seeking to transform a fallen world

The consequence of focusing on only one these four faces:

- Sacramental: idolatry; losing mystery
- Mystic: escapism; not caring for nature
- Reserved: Nihilism; abandoning nature
- Active: humanism; subordinating nature to man

HOW RELIGION CAN SUPPORT CONSERVATION

- Sacramental: protecting God's image among us
- Mystic: valuing the unknown relationships of ecology
- Reserved: seeking ever more and diverse images of God
- Active: working to enhance nature, opposing its diminishment



WHAT FAITH COMMUNITIES BELIEVE ABOUT ECOLOGY: ORIENTATION AND GROUNDING

Where do we come from?



Why are we here?

Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion of over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the Ground." Genesis 1:26

The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it. Genesis 2:15

WHAT FAITH COMMUNITIES DO ABOUT ECOLOGY: NURTURE AND TRANSFORM



Can we survive?

Can we be better?

“RELIGION” IS NOT THE SAME AS “CHURCH”



Just because you go to church does not necessarily mean you are religious.

Just because you are religious does not necessarily mean you go to church.

But, churches can add meaning to ritual.

DO FAITH COMMUNITIES SEEK “COMMUNION” WITH SPECIAL (OR COMMON) PLACES?

I would like us all to make a serious commitment to respect and protect creation, to be attentive to every person, to counter the culture of waste and disposable, to promote a culture of solidarity and of encounter.

Pope Francis. General Audience June 5th, 2013.



DO FAITH COMMUNITIES SEEK “COMMUNION” WITH SPECIAL (OR COMMON) PLACES?

We are stewards of that which comes from and returns to God. We believe that all of life is precious and indeed that God has so designed creation that for one part to flourish all must flourish.

Statement of the Anglican Bishops, Lambeth Conference, August 2008



DO FAITH COMMUNITIES SEEK “COMMUNION” WITH SPECIAL (OR COMMON) PLACES?

*In all my days I have taken
care never to pluck a blade of
grass or flower needlessly,
when it had the ability to grow
or blossom. You know the
teaching of the Sages that
there is not a single blade of
grass below, here on earth,
which does not have a
heavenly force telling it Grow!*



Attributed to Rabbi Rav Kook

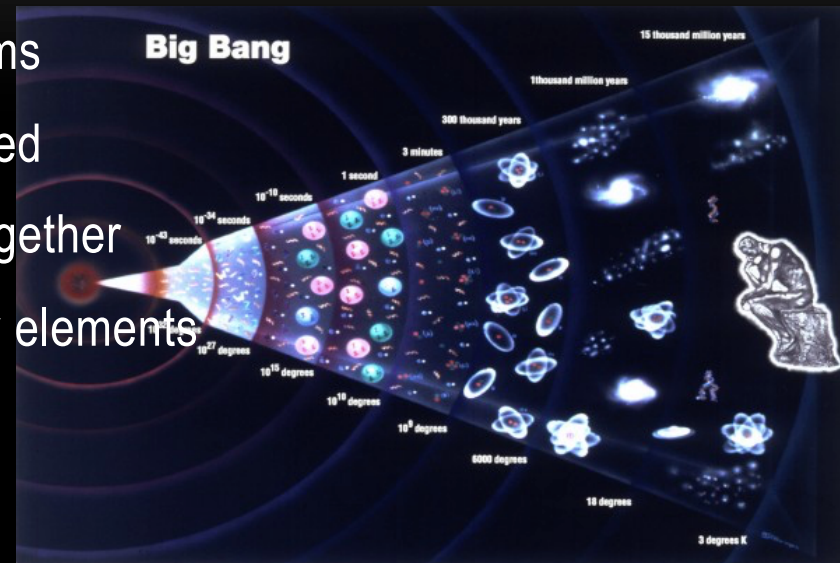
WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER FOUR MILLION ACRES?

- We have conserved over one million acres of New Hampshire.
- We aspire to conserve an additional one million acres of New Hampshire.
- What is to become of the rest?
- Can faith communities lead their members to do the right thing on all the land?
- How do we engage them?



THE NEW STORY: THE JOURNEY OF THE UNIVERSE (ON ONE SLIDE)

- There was a big bang, mostly energy, no atoms
- The universe expanded—at just the right speed
- Particles formed: H and He; they clumped together
- Stars formed; they exploded producing heavy elements
- The debris formed galaxies—and planets!
- Self organization led to life—and diversity!
- All life on Earth shares the same parent cell; we are family
- Diversity generated humans—and speech and thought!



The Universe (for believers, God) must have known that we were coming. For Christians, God so loved his creation, he took on human life. God and we have been creating beauty (harmonized diversity) ever since.

THE MISSION OF BELIEVERS IS TO COOPERATE
WITH GOD ON EXTENDING THE JOURNEY!

