**A Present Day Creation Story**

A Very Brief Introduction to the History of Everything – Catholic Edition

Why (Most) Catholics Aren’t Interested In Ecology And Justice (But Should Be)

**Puzzles**In high school I started to wonder about some of the things in the Bible. During a retreat I asked a priest a question about Genesis. How could the whole human race have descended from one man and one woman? Adam and Eve’s children would have had to marry each other. Men would have married their sisters. The whole human race would have been inbred. The priest remained silent; he did not reply. I have had another question for many years: the separation of faith from daily life. People who on Sunday go to mass and recite “I believe in God” and who “do this in memory of” Jesus, do terrible things, including things that God and Jesus have both explicitly forbidden, from Monday to Saturday (and sometimes on Sunday, too). For example, the pilot of the plane that dropped the bomb on Nagasaki was a Catholic, and the rest of the crew were Christians. They killed tens of thousands of civilians, including many Catholics and three whole congregations (congregations, not convents) of religious sisters. Before the plane left its base on Tinian, the Catholic chaplain, Fr George Zabelka, blessed the crew.

(Years later, during a visit to Yugoslavia, Zabelka realized the enormity of what he had done. He and a friend were saying the rosary in Medjugorje (the town is now in Bosnia and Herzegovina) on August 6. They agreed to stop and think about the moment the Hiroshima bomb was dropped. His friend tells what happened: “He absolutely collapsed in wailing. Collapsed. And he kept saying over and over and over again, 'How did I miss it? How did I miss it? I said my office, I said my mass, I said my rosary. How did I miss it? How did I miss it?' And everyone there was not only shocked, they were kind of afraid; it was literally wailing.”) I once asked a priest known internationally for his writing on prayer about this (separation of faith from daily life) and he replied that the question had never occurred to him. Further back in history we have the crusades (Pope Urban II helped initiate the first crusade; bishops participated in some; many Cistercians accompanied the Crusades as chaplains), the Inquisition and the colonization of much of the world. The Catholic Church was very much involved in the massacres, enslavement and exploitation of indigenous people. (See the 1986 film *The Mission*.) This separation of faith from everyday life has happened in Japan, too. On Christmas Day of 1567 Jesuit Fr Luis Frois, working from Sakai, invited men from both the armies then at war to celebrate the festival together in unity. They came gladly and left saying, “We are brothers in Christ,” but resumed the slaughter next morning. On another occasion, a war-torn general, taking monastic vows at the end of his campaigns, feigned deafness when they read to him the commandment against taking life. Apparently he realized that his career as a general was incongruous with his vows. I'm glad he at least realized this. If only we had the singlemindedness of Tameyoshi, the grandfather of Yoritomo, who, when summoned to the court, stated, “I come because I have been told to come by the head of my house. Otherwise, not even an imperial edict could bring me to the palace, for we Minamoto do not serve two masters.” This is the singlemindedness Jesus was asking for when he said, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate one and love the other, or you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24). Fr Zabelka and the crew of the plane that dropped the Nagasaki bomb may be extreme examples, but there are also countless examples from everyday life. Catholic bankers take money from the poor. Catholic politicians and bureaucrats make decisions that hurt the very people they are supposed to look after. Catholic business people do all they can to maximize profit even if it means taking from the poorest of the poor and damaging the environment. Why is this?Another puzzle I became aware of not so long ago is our destruction of the Earth. Biologist E. O. Wilson estimated in 1986 that we were extinguishing some ten thousand species annually. Now our use of fossil fuels threatens to destroy all life on Earth. All life on Earth! The Earth is our only home, but we are destroying it, and are mostly oblivious to this. How many people burn down their own home? How many people keep toxic waste in their own house? Is this why we are trying to find another habitable planet? And, of course, the Earth was created by God. We claim to worship God but destroy God's creation! Related to this puzzle is the relationship of Christianity to science. In the US there is a debate about evolution and creationism. Some people who believe the Bible story of creation cannot accept the theory of evolution. But there is only one world. Any truth has to be compatible with all other truth. If there is apparent conflict between two truths, the conflict has to be resolved. One, or both, of the ‘truths’ may have to be rethought. To solve these puzzles we need to know a little history. We need to know how we got to where we are. This booklet is my attempt to explain how we arrived at this state of affairs. I am not a scholar or any kind of expert. I have relied heavily on the authors who are mentioned at the end of the booklet. The booklet may have mistakes and omissions, but I believe it can still help readers to understand how daily life came to be separated from faith. Perhaps others will correct the mistakes and fill in the gaps. I wanted to write a booklet that most people could easily read, not a long scholarly work with hundreds of footnotes and references. (I intend to put these on the Columban website: http://www.columban.jp/)

**Creation**

At present the most widely accepted explanation among scientists of how the universe began is the Big Bang theory. (Investigation into the origins of the universe continues. Just today, 21 August, 2012, I read in a newspaper that some scientists have just proposed a different beginning for the universe:<http://www.theage.com.au/technology/sci-tech/melbourne-researchers-rewrite-big-bang-theory-20120821-24j5z.html>)Of course, Christians who believe these scientists also believe that God existed before the explosion and that God caused it. The Bang would have been a massive explosion of energy. Energy formed itself into particles. Some were attracted to each other and formed atoms. These formed great gas clouds. Inside clouds of hydrogen gas, which is made of the first and simplest atoms in the universe, denser atoms formed in the center. Around the center great loose balls of gas formed. In the center of such balls, the lively atoms and particles were pulled ever closer together until it became very hot from all the crowding. As these gas balls became hotter and heavier, they became stars. The first generation of stars became so heavy that they collapsed. They imploded and then exploded. The next generation of stars forged their atoms into bigger and heavier kinds until all the different elements of the universe were formed from the original hydrogen atoms. (For more fascinating detail, see, for example, *The Universe Story* by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry and *Earth Dance* by Elisabet Sahtouris.)Some atoms from exploding stars formed themselves into planets. Around four and a half billion years ago, some of the gas and dust from the star explosion that formed our Sun gathered into an Earthball made of twelve kinds of atoms. As it condensed, it grew heavier and spun around faster. The heat of the pressure and nuclear reactions inside it melted the packed matter into a fiercely burning liquid. But the outside of this fiery ball, touching cold space, cooled off as a thin crusty skin. The Earth’s skin was made of rock — around a hot, molten mantle of magma, with its heaviest elements at its solidifying core. We can see the hot liquefied elements of the mantle pouring out through volcanoes. Some steam escaped from lava and later condensed into rain. This formed into the seas. The energy of Sunlight stirred up the molecular electric forces, creating storms above and breaking up molecules in rock dust, mud and seawater, re-forming them into new and larger molecules. Large molecules, such as naturally forming sugars and acids, absorbed a great amount of energy, which was then useful in speeding up their chemical reactions to form ever larger molecules. The lively, energized carbon of the Earth combined with oxygen, nitrogen, sulfur and phosphorus. Over millions of years, life as we know it evolved. Just how it evolved, scientists are not sure. Some believe that life formed in the atmosphere as a result of chemical reactions associated with lightning and ultraviolet solar radiation. Others contend that it arose first in the ocean, in the vicinity of hot springs emanating from regions where fresh material emerges from the interior to interact explosively with cold ocean waters of distinctly different chemical composition, the first microbes forming in either seawater or wet mud. The first microbes would have been single-cell bacteria. Still today bacteria are by far the most numerous creatures of the Earth. **Humans** We humans are actually made of little other than the above-mentioned elements (carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, sulfur and phosphorus) plus hydrogen, all of which were forged in temperatures a million times hotter than molten rock, each atom fashioned in the blazing heat of a star. We are actually made of Star Atoms. Look at your hands. They are made of atoms from the stars, atoms that are billions of years old.We are absolutely dependent on the Sun. As you read this booklet, ions moving around in your brain are powering your thinking. What enables the ions to move? On what power do you rely for your thinking, feeling, and wondering?Ions don’t move by their own power. A close examination shows that an energy-soaked molecule in the brain is responsible for the ion movement. Closer examination shows that this molecule is able to push ions around because of energy it received, ultimately, from the food that you eat. The life form that we ingest as food received the energy from the Sun; such a life form traps a photon in the net of its molecular webbing, and this photonic energy pushes and pulls the ions in your brain, making possible your present moment of amazing human subjectivity. Right now, this moment, ions are flowing this way and that because of the manner in which you are organizing energy from the Sun.

But we are not done yet. Where did the photon come from? We know that in the core of our Sun, atomic fusion creates helium atoms out of hydrogen atoms, in the process releasing photons of sunlight. So, if photons come from hydrogen atoms, where did the hydrogen get the photons? This leads us all the way back to the edge of the primeval fireball, to the moment of creation itself. As mentioned above, the primeval fireball was a vast gushing forth of energy, first so powerful that it carried elementary particles about as if they were bits of bark on a tidal wave. But as the fireball continued to expand, the energy calmed down until ... the energy level decreased to a point where it could be captured by electrons and protons in the community of the hydrogen atom. Hydrogen atoms rage with energy from the fireball, symphonic storms of energy held together in communities extremely reluctant to give this energy up. But in the cores of stars, hydrogen atoms are forced to release their energy in the form of photons, and this photonic shower from the beginning of time powers your thinking! ‘So energy from the beginning of time powers us now: we are cosmic energy! We are the universe come to consciousness and the psychic energy by which we live is nothing other than the energy of the whole universe.’ The story of the universe is *our* story. If we do not know the story, we do not know ourselves.

**History**Early people did not know about the Big Bang. To make sense of the world around them, they developed stories to explain phenomena like seasons, droughts, floods, thunder and lightning, bushfires, eclipses, comets, death, menstruation, etc. The Australian Aborigines have the Dreamtime, the Greeks and Japanese have their myths. Ancient people may have concluded that the uncontrollable phenomena around them (fire, death, etc.) were created and controlled by some being or beings much more powerful than humans, beings they called gods. According to Iwai Hiromi, Japanese gods are born from feelings of awe at and threats from natural phenomena. Thousands of years ago in Western Asia some people developed a creation story in which God created the universe in seven days. In this story God creates men and women at the same time. Around the same time, another group of people, not far away from the first group, developed a creation story in which God first created a man and then, using a rib from the man, created a woman. Around 1700 BC some people from what is roughly present-day Israel and Palestine, and who included people from the groups who developed the two creation stories above, went to Egypt. Scholars think it was to find food in famine and/or to search for work. One name for these people was Hebrews: Gen. 12:10; 42:1-2. Originally they found favor with the Egyptian rulers, got land and prospered. However, when a new dynasty came to power and found the Hebrews had multiplied to become an internal threat to Egyptian socio-economic order (Ex. 1: 8-10), it determined to keep them under control.First, they set slave drivers over the Hebrews to increase the amount of work they had to do on the theory that the long hours would deprive them of time to organize or plan (Ex. 1:11-14). The hard work was not enough to control them. So then the Egyptians decided to exterminate the male children (Ex. 1:15-16). When the Pharaoh died, the Hebrews cried out to their God for liberation. Seeing the oppression and their desire for deliverance, God determined to free them (Ex. 2:23-25). God decided to work through the oppressed people and chose one of them, Moses, to lead the Hebrews to freedom. It was then that God appeared to Moses:

I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land, to a land rich and broad, ... the cry of the sons of Israel has come to me, and I have witnessed the way in which the Egyptians oppress them, so come, I send you to Pharaoh to bring the sons of Israel, my people, out of Egypt (Ex. 3: 7-10).

‘God chose one of the oppressed people to be the agent of their liberation. That is to say, the liberation will be a human one, accomplished according to the human mode of liberation’. ‘Leadership in liberation comes from within the people’. Maybe you saw the movie *Cry Freedom*. God was liberating the oppressed people of South Africa, working through Nelson Mandela and others. Recently we have seen something similar in Tunisia and Egypt. In Japan there were *yonaoshi-ikki*.God explained her/his name Yahweh as *the one who delivers*: “Say this to the sons of Israel, I am Yahweh, and therefore I will deliver you from the Egyptian burdens” (Ex. 6:6).This *therefore* is very important. God is a liberator of those who are oppressed. God wants to liberate all people who are oppressed. There was probably a revolt and a fight (recorded as the plagues), but the Hebrews were finally able to escape from Egypt. It seems that these people were only one of several groups of Hebrews who went up from Egypt to what is now Israel at about this time and later united into the ‘twelve tribes’. Exodus 12:38 says a crowd of mixed ancestry went with them.

The original inhabitants of Japan seem to have come from different areas of the Asian continent and the South Pacific region. The predominant strain is Mongoloid with a considerable mixture of people of Malayan origin. Some people are reluctant to recognize this diversity. In April 2001, on different occasions, I heard two different persons assert that the Japanese are a single race (Nihonwa tanitsu no minzoku desu), which implies that there are no minorities in Japan, and might also imply that the Japanese have always been a single people. This, at the very least, overlooks the presence of the Ainu, not to mention people of Korean, Chinese, etc. descent. It also overlooks the possibility that some Kumaso blood still remains. After the Hebrews reached Israel, land was allotted to each tribe and family. They hunted and began to farm. Until the time of David they were mainly farmers and shepherds. **Causes of Poverty (1)** I suspect that something like the following happened. Some families had many children and relatives to work the family farm. Some farms had good soil and plentiful water. These prospered. Others had few people to work the farm. Some had poor soil. Some were raided by enemies. Some lost crops and animals to wild animals, etc. Some lost crops and animals in floods or droughts. These did not prosper. When harvests were bad, they had to borrow from those who had plenty. If they could not repay their loans, they had to sell their land and become tenants or servants. Sometimes indebted people sold their children in order to repay a loan. The most unfortunate had to sell themselves, i.e., become slaves. Those who had to sell land sold it to those who could afford it, i.e. those who were already well off; or else gave it as payment to those they had borrowed from, who were the affluent. In this way those not doing well financially became less well off, while those already well off acquired more land and became even wealthier. So some had more land than originally allotted and some had none. In this way rich and poor came into existence. In Lev. 25: 23-28 it says ‘[l]and will not be sold absolutely.’ In the Jubilee Year (every fiftieth year) land was to be returned to its original owner: ‘(h)e will ... regain possession of his ancestral property’ (Lev. 25: 41). The people who thought up this law knew that land was necessary for both the livelihood of families and also the stability of society. Everyone in the nation, rich included, benefited if the poor could keep/regain their land. A similar process has happened more than once in Japan. In the eighth century the government charged as much as 35% interest per annum on their advance of seed rice. There were cases, when payment was delayed, in which the interest exceeded the capital, and small farmers were ruined, their families dispersed and landless. In the Meiji era, many farmers failed because they could not cope with price fluctuations or were unable to increase their productivity. They became indebted, lost their land, and became tenants or common laborers. According to Sato Nobuhiro, by 1927 30-40% of the farmers had lost their land this way. As long as every Hebrew family had the same amount of property and lived in the same way, there were no rich and no poor. But then rich and poor appeared. Social strata had developed. Speaking of the village at Tirzah (mentioned in 1 Kgs 14: 17), archaeologist and biblical scholar Roland de Vaux described the difference between the same town in the tenth century BCE and in the eighth century BCE. Houses in the tenth century BCE were all the same size and design. Every family lived in the same way. But in the eighth century BCE houses were no longer uniform. The rich houses were bigger and in a different area from the poor houses.

**Causes of Poverty (2): The Burden of the Monarchy**King Solomon increased the economic burden of the poor. He decided that each of the twelve regions would support his court for one month a year. He conscripted 30,000 workers to erect his great buildings. While people were working for the king, they could not work on their farms. This conscription was one of the major causes of the revolt of the northern tribes, at the death of Solomon in 931. Solomon borrowed heavily and had to give twenty cities in Galilee to a foreign king in repayment. I wonder how those people felt when, without moving house, they found they lived in another country! Vacant land, which under the law should have been returned to the original owners for reallocation, became the property of the crown so that the king had land with which to reward his officers. Added to Solomon’s expenses was the outlay required for continual war, both domestic and foreign. At this time prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.) appeared. They condemned the wealthy and powerful for exploiting their fellow countrypeople. The wealthy and powerful killed all the prophets. **Formation of the Bible**Once the escapees settled in Israel their priests and holy people began to collect and write down the stories that were important to them. They eventually became the books in what we now call the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible. This took many hundreds of years and Genesis, for example, was not finished till about 500 BC. The people who chose the stories to include in Genesis decided to include both versions of the creation story mentioned above. The story in which God simultaneously created men and women appears in Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said: “Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth.”

God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

The story in which God created the man before creating the woman appears in Genesis 2: 7-23:

[T]he Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed...

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him.”

... the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.The Lord God then built the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman. When he brought her to the man, the man said:

“This one, at last, is bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

This one shall be called ‘woman,’

for out of man this one has been taken.”

In my experience, most Catholics know the story of the woman being created after the man, but not the story of them being created simultaneously. Why ? Incidentally, just as there are two accounts of the creation of humans in Genesis, so also there is more than one version of some of Japan's myths. The myths in the Kojiki are slightly different from those in the Nihonshoki. For example, in the Kojiki Amaterasu-oo-mikami was born when Izanagi washed his left eye. In the Nihonshoki Izanagi and Izanami together produced Amaterasu (called Oo-hirume-no muchi) to be the lord of the universe. Having reflected on what God said to Moses — “Say this to the sons of Israel, I am Yahweh, and therefore I will deliver you from the Egyptian burdens” (Ex. 6:6) — they believed that God had freed them, so later when they were writing the history of their escape they saw the hand of God in all the events which were a part of their liberation.

**The Ten Commandments**Over the centuries they came to understand that their God was a God who freed people from anything that enslaved them, not just physical enslavement: fear, illness, sin, etc. They wrote down in the Ten Commandments the rules that were necessary for them to respect one another’s freedom and so create a free society. Though it was their wise and holy people who drew up these commandments, the Hebrews knew that God was the ultimate author: God inspired their wise and holy people to think up the commandments. Did they have the commandments so soon after leaving Egypt or did they develop them over the years and later include the story of the commandments where it is now? I suspect that they developed the commandments after settling in Palestine. But I also expect that the experience of oppression and suffering in Egypt helped them to realize that, for example, killing and theft are wrong. When Egyptians murdered their children, their pain told them that murder was wrong and they decided to try to build a society where there would be no murder. Hence, Thou shalt not kill. Obviously, if they do not kill, there will be no murder. If they do not steal, there will be no theft. If they have no other gods, they will worship and obey only the God who led them from Egypt. The worship and obedience this God demands is the obedience of the commandments, i.e. respecting life and property. Respecting life and property is worship of God. God does not ask us to bow down before an altar or statue. God wants us to respect and love one another. This is crucial and often misunderstood. God is not displeased when we pray and take part in the mass, but what God wants most of all is for us to love and serve one another.

**Jesus** Having worked in parishes in Australia and Japan, my impression is that most Catholics have almost no idea of what Jesus did and why he did it. In order to understand Jesus — what he did and why he did it — we need to understand the political situation in Palestine at the time. In 63 BC, the Romans invaded and colonized what is now Israel. They heavily taxed the escapees’ descendants in order to support a high standard of living in Rome. About two thirds of the gross yield of the land went in taxes (to local authorities and to Rome). Many people were in debt. One time, impoverished people burnt down the debt archives. (Peasants in Japan burned land and tax records.) This was the situation when Jesus was born.The poor lived at a bare subsistence level, and if drought, debt, disease or death forced them off their land, they ended up as sharecroppers, tenant farmers, or worse.Some people cooperated with the Romans, for example, the Sadducees. They were the hereditary aristocracy and, being rich, did not want trouble with the Romans. The Sadducees were one of four significant groups at that time. The Pharisees opposed the Romans and wanted to establish a theocracy. The Essenes were dissident priests who had broken with the Temple priesthood about 150 BC. They lived a pure, communal life in remote places waiting for God to liberate Israel. Then there were bands of guerilla fighters who attacked the Romans. A prophet, John the Baptist, appeared. He was different to the Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes. He prophesied disaster (Mt 3:7). He called for repentance and social morality, i.e. a return to a life based on the commandments (Lk 3:10-14). He started a big social movement (Mt 3:5; Lk 3:7) and baptized people as a sign of repentance. He disregarded the Temple and the priests who had rules about how a person could get their sins forgiven — for a fee. John baptized away from the Temple, and for free! Why did John preach repentance? John believed that the country was in this predicament because the Hebrews were not respecting each others’ rights, i.e. they were not keeping the commandments. Therefore he predicted punishment and catastrophe. Soon after John began his work, Jesus appeared on the scene. Jesus chose to be baptized by John. Even John thought it strange (Mt 3:14). I think Jesus chose to be baptized because he believed John’s understanding of the situation to be correct (Mt 3:16-17).Jesus committed himself to John’s campaign and God was pleased! "Today have I fathered you" (Lk 3:22). This could mean that Jesus became Son when he made this decision, i.e. when he understood why the country was in such a terrible situation and committed himself to do something about it. After this Jesus began his own public movement (Jn 3:22). He appears to have begun by baptizing, i.e. calling people to repentance, i.e., a change of lifestyle: a return to a life based on the commandments (Jn 4: 1-3). But he appears to have stopped baptizing not long after he began. For some reason, he seems to have changed direction. In Lk. 4:16-19 Jesus announces his new plan. (The Lord's Year of Favor is a reference to the Jubilee mentioned above.) Jesus decided to seek out the poor, the outcaste, the sick, and the sinners (Mt 9: 10-13), etc. This was a second decision by Jesus (the first being the decision to be baptized by John). John called for individual repentance (change) and waited for divine intervention. Jesus believed that society needed to be changed. You might say that, while John was waiting for God (to act to change society), Jesus believed that God was waiting for us (to act to change society). Jesus tried to get people to change society — by changing themselves, including the way they lived. If Jesus was from a carpenter family, it meant he himself was lower than peasantry. He was living on the edge of mere subsistence. The Gospels present Jesus as confining the bulk of his ministry to the country rather than the cities, and present Jesus and his followers as homeless wanderers. The poor could not afford sacrifices in the Temple and so were regarded as sinners and excluded from many religious and social events. Jesus was criticized for spending time with the poor and outcaste, so this was not acceptable to at least some of the social leaders (Lk 15: 1-2). Why did Jesus make this second decision? It was because of his compassion for the poor, the outcaste, the sick, and the sinners (Mt 9: 36; 14:14). Jesus forgave sins. In those days you were either a sinner or not a sinner and every one knew which you were. RR Plan 87 (Japan had its 'sinners'. In many places eta and hinin were forbidden to enter the grounds of shrines and temples. A Tokugawa official observed when an outcast was killed for trying to enter the grounds of a shrine: "The life of an eta is worth about one-seventh the life of a townsperson. Unless seven eta have been killed, we cannot punish a single townsperson.") I find it hard to understand that when Jesus said to someone, “Your sins are forgiven” (Lk 7: 48), they believed that their sins were forgiven! Why did they believe this poor, itinerant teacher? The religious authorities taught that they had to perform certain rites in the Temple in order to have their sins forgiven, but Jesus ignored this requirement. Jesus healed the sick. Sickness was often regarded as a punishment for sins, so the sick were believed to be sinners and were excluded in many ways. Therefore, healing was more than just physical or psychological healing: Jesus removed their humiliation and made it possible for them to take their place in society. In fact, almost all of Jesus’ healing and nature miracles were a rearranging of social relationships and therefore of the social order. The other important thing Jesus did was teach people about God (Mt 4:17, 23; Mk 1:14-15). He claimed that the time when God ruled the world (the Reign of God) was coming. Jesus taught people how they had to live if they wanted to be part of this. His teaching centered on how to deal with money, power and status. For him, these were the main obstacles to personal holiness and to a just society. The desire for money, power and status was the reason poverty had appeared in Israel. (If you read the various statements from the Church today, it might seem that the most serious sins are those related to sex: abortion, sex before marriage, homosexuality, divorce, etc. Jesus did not talk much about these subjects. So this would seem to be an area where the Church’s focus has diverged from that of Jesus.) He taught his disciples to be servants of everyone (Jn 13:1-15; Mk 9:33-37; Mk 10:42-45).It is important to note that the Reign of God is to be realized *in this world* — it is not the same as Heaven. For Jesus it was a politically structured society of people here on Earth, what the world would be like if God was on the throne or in the Whitehouse. Jesus was trying to get people to believe in this, to get them to live like this. Now! Note that Jesus never tells his initial apostles to set up a foundational, grounded place where people will come to them. That’s the first stage of institutionalism, and Jesus gives us no foundation for institutionalization. He was talking about a movement. He says we should go out to people, especially the poor. Jesus gradually attracted disciples and eventually formed a large movement. People began to think that Jesus was someone special, though there were doubters, even in his own family. Some of his relatives thought he was mad (Mark 3: 21). He must have been a man of great charisma if he was able to get men to leave their families and jobs and follow him, and to get people to believe him when he said, “Your sins are forgiven.” I find Mackey helpful here.

The faith of Jesus was his lived conviction that all things great and small, and particularly all people, were treasure, given us by God to be treasured as God treasured them. Jesus' achievement was to accept all those with whom he came in contact, as God accepted God’s children, especially those whom society decreed outcasts, to seat them at the ritual banquet, and to serve their real needs. Like the rest of us, the man Jesus came from nothing and he had nothing except what was given to him. His very life and everything which came to him in life was gift. Out of the bounty freely given he freely gave. Life itself, and everything that became part of that life, he held as a grace, as one holds a precious gift, gently, as one holds a soft, delicate thread which, as it is drawn back will, if one does not pull at it and break it, draw one to its very source.

Grace was never more realized in the life of Jesus than it was in his death. He had lived out in his life the faith-conviction that all was grace and God was gracious to all; he had given his life in witness to this conviction and in the openness and service to others which that conviction required for its own realization. When that lived conviction threatened the power structures of his society to the point where those who manned these structures, in full conviction that they were necessary for the people's peace, decided that he should therefore be executed, then he gave his life in that final and complete gesture of witness to his faith conviction and so consummated his lived conviction of grace. He thus gave it the greatest power, the supreme inspirational potential, the most effective spirit, that any lived conviction can be given on this Earth.So Paul can speak of grace without qualification, of the grace of God, and say that it is the saving of us. To be truly graced by the world in its greatness and smallness, its joy and suffering, to live in this state of grace, this overcomes the grasping and coveting, the tearing away and boasting, with all their life-destroying implications. It does this when we can 'receive it' in faith, when the faith of Jesus, inspired in us by him, enables us to see all life and existence as grace, enables all life and existence to grace us, and simultaneously empowers us to grace others.

Some people thought Jesus was a prophet. Some came to think he was the person who would drive out the Romans and free Israel. Perhaps this is why the Romans decided to execute him. This next part is difficult. I am not sure what happened. What I suggest may be upsetting. Most if not all of his hand-picked lieutenants deserted Jesus when he was arrested. After Jesus was executed they somehow experienced Jesus and realized that Jesus forgave them for deserting him. The experience changed them forever. The people who had fled when Jesus was arrested and who had gone into hiding suddenly discovered the courage to preach to the same authorities who had arrested and executed their leader. In an attempt to describe a difficult-to-describe experience, they said Jesus had risen from the dead. (A religious sister told me of her experience when an intimate companion died. She could really feel the presence and love of her dead companion.) According to Mackey, preconceived notions of the nature of resurrection prevent us from seeing what is written on the pages we read. Mackey says that, for Paul, to say that ‘Jesus is raised’ is to say that Jesus is a life-giving spirit palpable in our lives as faith, hope and love — a spirit that enables us to overcome destructive evil. He goes on to say that the resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament is the myth of the man Jesus. A myth is a story that moves our awareness to that depth where the vital ties that bind us to our world and to our fellows, where matters of life and death, where the awful ambiguity, the contingency of existence, come into focus. If the resurrection is a myth, that tells us something about the point on the spectrum of human perception and expression at which it operates, not whether it is right or wrong. We see in Acts of The Apostles 2: 44-46 that the disciples began to live the kind of life that Jesus had called them to. Their preaching and the way they lived attracted thousands of people and Christianity spread throughout Western Asia and into Europe and Africa. Disputes arose from time to time about the significance of Jesus. As the Christian community (the Church) settled these disputes (often by convening councils, of which Vatican II is the most recent), their understanding of Jesus grew and they developed doctrines to protect the important items of their faith. Oscar Cullmann says that their faith grew in many stages. Early disciples saw Jesus as a teacher or prophet. Then they came to see him as the Suffering Servant of God mentioned in Isaiah. A further development saw Jesus a the High Priest. Then he was seen as the Messiah (for whom the Hebrews had been waiting. Further developments saw Jesus as the Son of Man, the Lord, Savior, the Word of God, Son of God, and finally God. So disciples didn't believe he was God while he was alive. Hebrews couldn’t believe this — there was only one God. This belief developed only slowly. **Formation of the Canon & the Inspiration of the Bible**

Christians went to many countries and founded communities there. Each founder told the stories about Jesus he or she remembered. These collections varied from founder to founder. Thus we have four Gospels in our Bible. As the disciples who had known Jesus personally began to die, the Christian communities realized that they needed to write down all the stories about Jesus, otherwise they could be lost forever. There are other Gospels and letters that the early Church decided not to include in the New Testament. The Church believed that these books were inspired by God. (That doesn't mean that other books were not inspired by God. It does mean that the Church thought that the books included in the New Testament are sufficient to explain its experience of Jesus.) Because Christians did not believe in the Roman gods or the Roman empire, they were persecuted. Unable to own land (with a few exceptions) they met in homes and, when persecution was not a worry, public places. In the fourth century Emperor Constantine, who became a Christian, stopped the persecution and recognized Christianity. He financed a meeting hall built in the style of a basilica, a rectangular building with a raised floor at one end which was used for state ceremonies. It became the dominant form of church architecture, even though more suited to watching than participating.

Constantine gave bishops the authority to act as judges in civil suits since they were educated and respected. After Roman custom they were given signs of their rank: special cape, headgear, footwear, a ring. It was the first time clergy dressed differently from the rest of the people.

Theodosius became emperor in 379 and made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. ‘The wholesale conversion of the Roman empire in the fourth century, the baptism of Christians from infancy in the fifth century, and the mass baptisms of the Germanic peoples beginning in the sixth century meant that many attended the liturgy because of custom rather conviction’. ‘(I)t was sometimes difficult to tell whether those who wished to join the church did so out of conviction or convenience. In the face of growing numbers of conversions, the period of preparation and teaching was shortened ...’. Christians began to persecute pagans! They destroyed temples or converted them into churches. The empire declined and people looked to the Church for leadership. The Church became the most powerful institution in Europe. It also declined in many ways: there were various kinds of corruption. It also made mistakes.The catechism was emphasized, partly for illiterate people. Gradually Christianity became more of a 'heady' faith: belief in doctrines rather than an experience of the risen Jesus. The Church believed Christianity is the one true religion and that only Christians could go to heaven. Therefore, it believed, all other religions were wrong and perhaps even harmful. Despite the commandments forbidding us to kill, and despite Jesus' command to forgive one another and love our enemies, the Church thought it had a duty to destroy false religions in order to protect the true religion. It disobeyed its own teachings when it persecuted and killed people. I think it important to admit that here the Church disobeyed God and Jesus.

**The Black Plague**

The traumatic effects of the Black Plague in the 14th century resulted in a “deep aversion to the natural world that has profoundly conditioned the Western cultural tradition ever since”.

**Scientific Developments in the Middle Ages**Ancient people saw the sun rise in the East and set in the West and concluded that the sun moves around the earth. The people who created the stories that became the books of the Bible believed that the sun moved around the earth and spoke of the sun rising and setting. Much later, when Christians came to believe that the Bible was the inspired Word of God, they believed that descriptions of the sun rising and setting were also divinely inspired and therefore correct. Scientists in the Middle Ages invented the telescope and made important discoveries about the universe. They realized that the Earth revolves around the Sun. This seemed to contradict the Bible, for example, Genesis 15: 12 (Now as the sun was setting …). Church authorities, believing that the Bible is divinely inspired and therefore correct, condemned the scientists’ claim. Giordano Bruno, a Dominican and the first philosopher-scientist to revive the ancient notion that the Earth moves around the Sun, was burned at the stake in 1600 by the priests of the ‘Holy’ Inquisition. Scientists enjoyed much success with their investigations into the natural world. But many then concluded that all of reality could be similarly investigated with telescopes, microscopes and mathematics: that only what can be measured is real. This was a mistake on the part of scientists. The Church was unable to distinguish the positive advances of science from its mistakes and so was happy to condemn science *in toto*. This was a mistake on the part of the Church. But the scientific discoveries were more than just a challenge to accepted science. They were a challenge to the entire European civilization in its basic sense of reality and value, the foundations not only of personal belief but even of public order. Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585) and Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590) were convinced that the Church must become an effective political reality. Any fragmentation of the social order was judged intrinsically evil, the expression and consequence of sin. Individuals and governments were considered subject to a single eternal system of justice based ultimately on eternal and divine law, of which the Catholic Church was sole guardian and interpreter. In this climate of opinion a revolution in science or any other field of human endeavor could easily be perceived as a threat unless shown to agree with the teachings of the Church. As mentioned above, there were also problems within the Church. A list of laxities within the Church can only hint at the depths of the need for reform: cardinals, bishops, and priests chronically absent from their domains of responsibility; irregularities in clerical training and abysmal literacy levels among parish priests; rampant granting of privileges and dispensations; priestly ownership of private land; and unchecked drunkenness, concubinage and hunting among the clergy. In 1545 Pope Paul III called a council in the Italian Imperial city of Trent. No wonder that the overriding issue confronting the council was the need to give the faithful some feeling of security by restoring clerical discipline and providing a highly structured theology. Whatever real reforms were eventually made, however, the new initiatives created an atmosphere of obsessional control over detail, endless doctrinal clarifications by councils, synods, and theologians, suspicion of deviancy, and a proclivity for inflexible legalistic remedies in areas of social conflict … This legacy is still with us today. Three influential scientists: Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, Isaac Newton With the Church denying scientists’ discoveries and persecuting the scientists themselves, it would not be surprising if some scientists lost respect for the Church and religion. Until then people in Europe had taken for granted that the universe was a unity with all components following divine laws and maintaining a level of harmony. Englishman Francis Bacon (1561-1626) believed that human intelligence had as its primary purpose the understanding and control of nature. Frenchman René Descartes (1596-1650) divided the physical world and the mind into two entirely different realms. At a single stroke he did away with western consciousness of any inner vital principle of the living world, the sense of soul in the nonhuman world. English scientist Isaac Newton (1642-1727) believed that the universe was a giant mechanical construct, and that like a machine its parts should be isolated and examined one by one to be understood. These views continue to influence science and our attitude towards the world today. If humans are meant to control nature, well, maybe it is alright for us to alter the environment by building huge dams and genetically engineering plants and animals. And if the physical world and the mind are indeed two entirely different realms, well, the mind is obviously more important and what we do to the physical world does not really matter. And if the universe is just a giant mechanical construct, why not treat it as we would a car engine or computer? This approach has dominated the West and came to Japan along with Perry. (On my hikes, I often come across *hokora* in remote places. Are they reminders of earlier people's respect for nature, a respect Japanese people abandoned in their attempt to catch up with the West? Maybe we could place *hokora* in our churchyards and convent grounds.)



The otherworldly and transcendent orientations of the Western religions accommodated the objective method of science as an appropriate control over nature. Modern Western cultural traditions, including religious and moral traditions, law and politics, science, education, and medicine have all supported human dominance over the natural world. This is why a scholar like Lynn White can claim that Christianity bears significant responsibility for our destruction of the environment. This dominance over the natural world is particularly the position of the industrial-commercial world, the world of the great national and transnational corporations. This is why so many business lobbyists gathered to influence the decisions made in Kyoto.

Twentieth century developments in science have demolished the idea that the universe is a machine. The unity of the entire complex of galactic systems is among the most basic experience of contemporary physics. Scientists are moving towards a complete explanation of our physical universe and how it operates. And this will be in complete harmony with Christianity. For scientists such as Brian Swimme and Elisabet Sahtouris and theologian and priest Thomas Berry (1914-2009), living things are not built up from pieces as is machinery. Life forms are not assembled by accident from molecules here and there on some non-living planets and then in turn assembled into ecological systems. Rather, some whole planets develop the metabolism of living beings, coming ever more alive in the great flow of energy between their stars and themselves, gradually packaging their crustal material into ever more creatures that weave their own changing environments. They believe that the universe itself is a developing community of beings, and also that some form of intelligent reflection on itself was implicit in the universe from the beginning. Freeman Dyson says that the universe must have known from the beginning that we were coming. For them the Earth is a living organism. They point out that the Earth regulates its temperature despite the Sun’s steadily increasing heat.

Sahtouris goes so far as to say that we are wrong to devote our attention to saving or managing nature. The Earth will save herself with or without us. Our disastrously unintelligent interference in its affairs will not kill the planet, but it may very well kill us as a species.

These scientists believe that ‘(w)e are the universe come to consciousness.’ ‘This means that who we are is the consciousness of the universe ... The very first step to understand ourselves is to glory in the story of the universe as our foundational truth. But this step is not to be taken for granted: for quite some time now many of us have been living out consumerist productive values which are simply not sustainable on our Earth. Our self-understanding has been at the expense of the Universe! Our mode of life is a denial of belonging to the Earth, a refusal to accept the human condition as limited. This vitiates any spirituality we may lay claim to’. ‘We are the universe come to consciousness.’ It is not that we think about the universe; the universe, rather, thinks itself, in us and through us. We are part of the universe. The universe is bigger than us. Its concerns are more important than ours. ‘The universe itself is the primary sacred community’. We have to change our way of thinking from human-centered to universe-centered. Players on a soccer team put the team ahead of personal desires and make sacrifices for the team. A particular player scoring a goal is not as important as the team winning. In war citizens put their country ahead of themselves and make sacrifices for it. Individual acts of bravery are worthless if one's country loses the war. We have to realize that we are all players on the Universe team, put it ahead of ourselves and make sacrifices for it. Even if I get rich, it is meaningless if the Earth is harmed in the process. Our universe is in a sense brought into being by the participation of those involved in it. It is a dance, for participation is its organizing principle. It is no longer useful to see ourselves as forced to compete with one another to survive in a hostile society, surrounded by hostile nature. The point here is that we, at present, do see ourselves in such competition, not because it is inevitable, but because Western science developed in close harmony with social and political traditions that welcomed these ideas. **Developments in Interpretation of the Bible**In the 18th and 19th centuries scholars began to notice apparent mistakes in the Bible. For example, Dt 24: 1 contradicts Mk 10: 11-12. If the Bible is inspired by God, how could there be mistakes in it?

When a man, after marrying a woman, is later displeased with her because he finds in her something indecent, and he writes out a bill of divorce and hands it to her, thus dismissing her from his house ... (Dt 24: 1)

He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” (Mk 10: 11-12)

In 1902 Pope Leo XIII established the Pontifical Biblical Commission whose members were all cardinals. They issued decrees defending, for example, that Genesis 1-3 is to be interpreted literally and historically. That would appear to mean, among other things, that Adam and Eve's children married each other. There are other difficult passages, for example Psalm 137: 8-9:

Desolate Daughter Babylon, you shall be destroyed;

blessed the one who pays you back what you have done us!

Blessed the one who seizes your children and smashes them against the rock.

God could not possibly have inspired these verses. Today, even though we know that it is the Earth that moves, i.e. we know that the Bible is not precise when it describes the Sun as moving, this does not prevent us from believing that the Bible is divinely inspired and revelation. We have revised our understanding of what divine inspiration means in the case of the Bible. We now believe that the doctrine of Divine Inspiration of the Bible does not imply that the whole of the Bible is literally true, only that the Bible reveals God to us. Aided by advances in Biblical scholarship, the Church, for so long part of the establishment, is slowly returning to its Biblical roots. The Synod in 1971 stated that 'Action on behalf of justice is a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel' (*Justice in the World*, 6). In the last 30 years or so the phrase ‘preferential option for the poor’ has been adopted by the constitutions of 86% of all religious communities.

Pope John Paul II wrote the following:

In order to achieve social justice in the various parts of the world, in the various countries, and in the relationships between them, there is a need for ever new movements of solidarity of the workers and with the workers. This solidarity must be present whenever it is called for by the social degrading of the subject of work, by exploitation of the workers, and by the growing areas of poverty and even hunger. The Church is firmly committed to this cause, for she considers it her mission, her service, a proof of her fidelity to Christ, so that she can truly be the "Church of the poor". *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work) #8 (1981)

More recently, the Church has finally started to waken to the ecological crisis. Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have spoken out on the environment. Here are a few of their statements.

The gradual depletion of the ozone layer and the related "greenhouse effect" has now reached crisis proportions as a consequence of industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and vastly increased energy needs. Industrial waste, the burning of fossil fuels, unrestricted deforestation, the use of certain types of herbicides, coolants and propellants: all of these are known to harm the atmosphere and environment.

Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it *takes a serious look at its life style*. In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause. As I have already stated, the seriousness of the ecological issue lays bare the depth of man's moral crisis. If an appreciation of the value of the human person and of human life is lacking, we will also lose interest in others and in the earth itself. Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become a part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few.

Pope John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation* (Message for World Day of Peace, 1990) #6, #13

(H)umanity, if it truly desires peace, must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology. Experience shows that disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence, and vice versa. It becomes more and more evident that there is an inseparable link between peace with creation and peace among men.

Pope Benedict XVI, *The Human Person, the Heart of Peace* (Message for World Day of Peace, 2007) #8

It is not hard to see that environmental degradation is often due to the lack of far-sighted official policies or to the pursuit of myopic economic interests, which then, tragically, become a serious threat to creation. To combat this phenomenon, economic activity needs to consider the fact that “every economic decision has a moral consequence” and thus show increased respect for the environment.

Pope Benedict XVI, *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation* (Message for World Day of Peace, 2010) #7

... being itself, our earth, speaks to us and we must listen if we want to survive and to decipher this message of the earth.

Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with the clergy of the dioceses of Belluno-Feltre and Treviso, 2007

Benedict was not just talking. He had more than 2,000 photovoltaic panels installed on the roof of the Nervi Hall in the Vatican. In 2007 the Holy See announced that it would become the world's first carbon-neutral state by planting trees in a national park in Hungary in order to offset its carbon-dioxide emissions.

**Conclusion**Our rediscovery of Jesus and our discovery of the Universe story present us with hard choices. Jesus wanted Israel to return to true worship of God — the practice of justice — and began a huge social movement to rearrange the social order, but over the centuries we lost sight of this and individual spirituality became the center of Christian practice. Daily prayer, Sunday mass, confession. Popes and bishops, ignorant of Jesus' preference for the poor, allied themselves with the powerful and played politics with the best of them. This is where many of us still are. The Church still has embassies and even its own country! Popes and bishops still wear garb from the time of Constantine. (It is hard to believe that the Church ever took seriously the separation of Church and politics.)

(In a dramatic act in November 1963, Pope Paul VI laid his tiara on the altar of St. Peter's Basilica in a gesture of humility to symbolize the papacy's surrender of any claim to temporal power. He never wore it again. It was announced that the tiara would be sold and the proceeds of the sale given to charity. However, Francis Spellman, Cardinal of New York, arranged for the tiara to be bought by the Catholic Church in the United States in 1968.)

The Earth's resources are limited. There are not enough resources for the whole world to live our kind of lifestyle. So-called developed countries' use of resources is preventing the poor from using them, is causing global warming and also is polluting the Earth. If we want to practise justice, if we believe the poor have the right to live a better life, we have to reduce our use of resources so that they can use them.

If we believe, along with many Christian scholars, that the story of the Universe is also the story of God, that the story of the universe is a new revelatory experience of the divine, we must cherish the Earth. If we wish to stop further warming of the Earth, we have to stop using fossil fuels. Thus our faith is being questioned. Are we prepared to live simply and to *joyfully* live simply? Are we prepared to stop driving cars and to stop flying everywhere? Are we prepared to stop using air conditioners and to stop importing most of our food? (60% is imported. I sometimes wonder why Japanese people don't eat much Japanese food. Is there something wrong with it? Or are our farmers not very good at farming?)

Richard Rohr, an American Franciscan, calls for simplicity. "I think morality for the future is going to come by and large from the land, not from religion. And, let's be honest, shaming and commandments have not done a very good job thus far. I think the Earth itself is going to tell us we have to live simple lives, we have to live reverent lives, and we have to live together."

These developments have yet to reach the ordinary Catholic (and also many priests and bishops). Concern for the Earth must become central on the Church's agenda — in our dioceses and parishes. Just as organizing charity concerts for the poor can lead us to repress the question as to why they are poor in the first place, so we must avoid glossing over our own complicity in bringing about climate change. The challenge to live within the enabling limits of the actually existing universe is a conversion issue. It is time to get serious. Work needs to be done on the liturgical cycle. This was formed when the universe was thought to be unchanging, so it's repetitive and has no development. We urgently need environmental eucharistic prayers and environmental liturgies.

If we continue to go to mass on Sunday without making concern for the Earth our top priority, we don't believe in God.

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