



Justice Rising

Grassroots Solutions to Corporate Domination

Progressive Religion vs. Pervasive Corporate Corruption

by Henry Clark and Elizabeth Sholes

Corruption and morality dominate public and private discourse. The quest by religion and faith to install conscience as our leading light in an age of overwhelming amoral corporate power is the subject of this *Justice Rising*. We do not deny there is utility in the market. As Adam Smith observed, society does not depend upon the benevolence of the baker to have enough bread to eat—it is the self-interest of the baker which leads him to produce a sufficiency of this commodity.

The problem is that in any market, money is power. Concentration of wealth in the 19th century led to legal manipulations that steadily removed the balance between workers and owners as well as that between producers and consumers. Laws ultimately ceded rights to capital and eroded or removed those for everyone else. Laws made labor a commodity, gave civil rights to corporations but not to workers, and abandoned job creation to the fickle whims of profit demands. After the downturns of the 1970s, accumulation for the few, not the well being of the many, became the corporate norm.

But the evils of 21st century global capitalism have reached a new zenith in the ideology of *market fundamentalism*. This madness has been sold to the public by means of a massive propaganda campaign bankrolled by wealthy neo-conservatives. In this age of mass media, corporate propaganda has succeeded in convincing Americans that everything ought to be for sale. Jobs providing social well-being are sacrificed to create greater private profit. We no longer have a safe supply of good drinking water provided by a public utility. Now we have—at enormously increased cost—bottled water.

Market fundamentalism gives government no right to allocate any economic resource for the common good. In this amoral, corporate model, government is, for all practical purposes, abolished. Governmental agencies which ought to regulate disproportionate corporate power and balance public and private goods are bypassed or eliminated. Legislators in the pockets of lobbyists "earmark"

expenditures and tax breaks for the wealthy while abetting the erosion of rights and supports for those who are either displaced in the quest for ever-cheaper labor or harmed by dangerous working conditions and poorly designed products.

The right-wing ideological offensive has created more than unjust laws, policies and outcomes. The real corruption of our time is not simply the blatant theft of public money by the Abramoffs, DeLays, and Cunninghams inside and outside the beltway, but the wholesale promotion of the proposition that it's a dog-eat-dog world, a zero-sum game—the "I got mine" vision of society. Herein lies the great disconnect of our time: this is Social Darwinism practiced by those who repudiate Darwin in science. Conservative Christians and conservative economics have become strange allies in this world of private salvation and private acquisition run amok.

Although progressive and mainstream Christians as well as non-Christians, outnumber arch-conservatives, the practice of the Social Gospel, in which the presence of the common good is essential, has practically vanished from our national awareness. The work by progressive people of faith has gone on unabated but has been rendered virtually invisible in our national consciousness and public policy. The articles included in this edition of *Justice Rising* are part of the voice of that justice-seeking community of faith that is motivated not by drive for theocracy but by faith principles exercised on behalf of all.

The challenge to faith communities is tackling global corporate policies that have decimated regions of the US and Third World.

Elizabeth Sholes, page 2

The political clout of religious reactionaries is not something to be ignored or treated with mere ridicule.

Henry Clark, page 3

Protection of people from concentrated wealth lay at the heart of the nation's original 'moral values.'

Peter Laarman, page 4

Corporate powers try to influence mainline churches to change stances on corporate divestment, and to be a partner rather than a critic of the gross accumulation of wealth.

Cassandra Carmichael & Rebecca Barnes Davies, page 12

A Publication of the Alliance for Democracy



photo: Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice

Creating a Moral Economy in a World Corrupted by Corporate Power

by Elizabeth Sholes

The role of faith communities in creating a just society begins with the traditional role of charity—feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless. It must then move on to social justice, seeking not to ameliorate desperation but to alter the conditions that cause it. The progressive faith community has historically participated in major social movements from abolition through the anti-war and women's rights efforts. In each case the outcome favored progressive faith principles. While these followers of the traditional Social Gospel have recently been overshadowed by the Religious Right, their quest for justice has not been undone.

The newest challenge to faith communities is tackling global corporate policies that have decimated regions of the United States as well as Third World nations. From North American steel towns to Latin American rain forests, transnational policies have destroyed economic self-sufficiency, depressed wages, eliminated benefits, eroded community cohesion, and even threatened cultural survival. We now have robber barons and worker despair on a worldwide scale.

Progressive missionaries and others have helped some Third World communities find a measure of economic self-sufficiency through creation of producer and grower cooperatives and other innovative programs that restore increased local control over production and consumption. Improvements in community cooperation coupled with a relative independence from global markets have breathed new life into a few once-desperate areas.

The same objective is now gaining a foothold within depressed American cities as a renewed vision of urban sustainability has begun to take root. Churches across the country are instrumental in generating economic life in community-directed productive and consumptive projects. Economic revitalization programs from East Oakland, California to Buffalo, New York have had faith community support and direction. Faith leaders are grappling with rebuilding a "moral economy" in which people count at least as much as private gain and communities can embrace sustainable businesses to fill unmet needs in socially responsible ways.

Faith communities, therefore, have had to get smart about public policy. Advocacy for the social safety net is no longer sufficient. Faith leaders have



Churches across the country are instrumental in generating economic life in community-directed productive and consumptive projects.

begun to understand the importance of using existing laws and creating future legislation that can shift the locus of control back to ordinary people.

Plant closing laws can help institute local control. Created to offset forced closings of liquor producers during Prohibition, federal tax laws permit accelerated depreciation of closed businesses to give the parent company huge sums back from past taxes. Declaring their abandoned business virtually worthless, companies get millions in cash from the government. That windfall has been the 'cash cow' of corporate business since the shutdown of Youngstown Sheet & Tube in Ohio in the 1970s. Bethlehem Steel was handed nearly \$1 billion from the government when they closed their Lackawanna, NY plant in 1983.

Many shut-down businesses abandon workers and communities without fulfilling existing obligations they assumed when accepting state and local tax breaks and incentives. In lieu of repayment, state and local governments could acquire the business—but at this vastly depreciated price set by the corporation. Faith and community organizations could then work with state and local governments to re-sell these businesses at low prices to the abandoned employees or the community, which can operate the business once again.

As in times past, progressive faith groups can lead economic revitalization by combining their traditional on-the-ground community organizing with savvy public policy. More important, they can redefine what is a "moral good" and once again use their leadership to bring about greater social justice for all.

Elizabeth Sholes is the Director of Public Policy for the California Council of Churches



Quaker Minister James Nailor entering Bristol with his revolutionary message. graphic: Bristol Radical History Group

by Jim Tarbell

Absence of ethical considerations in corporate/imperial decision making began with the birth of corporations, empire and liberal democracy in the 1600s. Coming out of the reformation that broke the iron grip of the church, the merchant class rose to hail the sanctity of individual accomplishment and personal gain as their morality.

In the first decade of the 17th century, the East India Company and the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie received charters as the first modern corporations. Under the authority of the British and Dutch states, these trading companies then raised armies and began conquering the world in the name of business profits. Big business and politics were intertwined from the beginning. The first three governors of the British East India Company also served as Mayors of London. Parliament became increasingly controlled by the merchant class.

By the mid 1640s, Parliament raised the New Model Army based on merit rather than inherited titles, defeated the monarchy and beheaded the king. Under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell, the New Model Army became a revolutionary political force. Elements within the army realized that all processes of the state apparatus, educational institutions and religious organization were succumbing gradually to theamoral logic and imperatives of the market. Accounting had become the norm. The relationship with God and the church was becoming contractual and depended on "calculation" rather than beliefs. As Christian redemption became commodified, true religious seekers became outraged.

Searching for a solution, groups within the army advocated the end of the monarchy as well as the aristocratic House of Lords. They promoted universal male suffrage and the elimination of private property. They embraced communally-owned land, resources and means of production.

Alarmed by these ideas, Parliament forced Cromwell to purge the army of the radicals. The ensuing unrest led to the emergence of the Quakers who developed their own universal covenant with God within. They did not have to

Corporate Empire & the Selling of the Soul

The recontainment of Christian faith into the private sphere was absolutely vital if capitalism was to operate without serious moral constraint.

— Douglas Gwyn, *The Covenant Crucified: Quakers and the Rise of Capitalism*

depend on the King, Parliament or the army to communicate with God.

Quaker preachers rallied huge crowds in northern England as they pointed out that "The emerging capitalist contract promised material ease and great profit to those willing to stifle the witness of the universal covenant." They saw that capitalists created a "covenant with the World" where everything is for sale according to the values of the market, where divine judgement and guidance are not allowed.

They implored that "trading has become a trap, to captivate men in deceitful dealings and vain customs and fashions, to serve the adulterous eye and vanity. In this trap the just become a prey to the insatiable, the obsessively self-interested." Vainglorious clothing and amusements "have lost the man of the heart through vanity." Consumerism "destroys the creation." Flattering merchandisers "cheat poor country people." "What traps there are in laws, which should protect the simple."

Quakers even suggested that lawyers and judges, like the Quaker preachers should serve without pay. They reasoned that since the lawyers and judges were making new laws under the developing capitalist order, they would be more likely to serve the common good if they served without pay, for otherwise they would serve the good of the corporate class which paid them.

Such pronouncements outraged merchant-class politicians. Parliament arrested James Nailor, the first Quaker minister to approach London. Then they spent three weeks convicting him of "horrid blasphemy." They publicly flogged the poor fellow and made him a spectacle for all to see. But the public flogging of the pious Quaker caused such outrage that Cromwell realized that the state had to get out of religious affairs and he instituted the first move toward separating church and state. Douglas Gwyn notes that "England's rise to world dominance, built upon militarism, imperialism, colonial slavery, and ruthless exploitation of domestic labor demanded" this separation of church and state in order to allow corporate empire to rule without moral constraint.

"England's rise to world dominance, built upon militarism, imperialism, colonial slavery, and ruthless exploitation of domestic labor demanded" this separation of church and state.



graphic: PBS

Morals in The War of America's Overclass

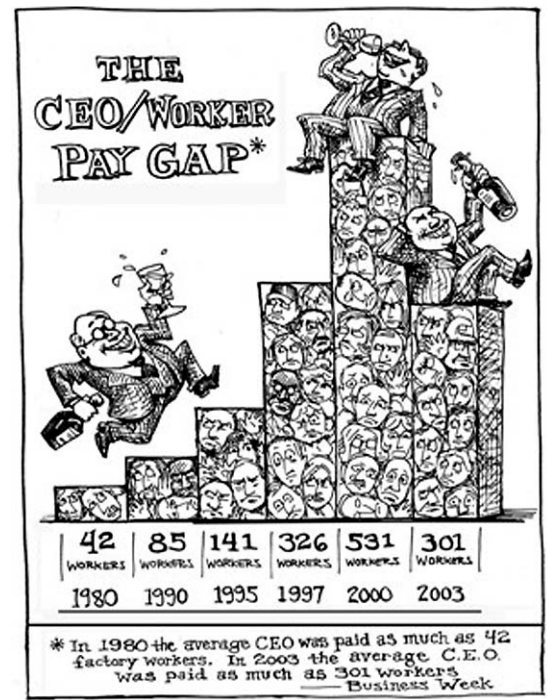
by Peter Laarman

Throughout the 19th century and up to the Reagan Revolution, anti-monopoly and antitrust sentiment drove a significant part of our politics and democratic discourse. Justice Brandeis spoke for a whole nation (minus its plutocrats) when he wrote "we can have a democracy or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of the few. We cannot have both."

We now know that the decline in our private pension system is partly caused by siphoning off worker pension plans to pay for lavish executive retirement benefits. Take the 430/1 ratio of current CEO/worker pay and ratchet that ratio up by several factors as the big cheese and his wage slaves enter their sunset years. The executives get pension payouts at a rate of 60 to 100 percent of their pre-retirement compensation. Meanwhile, the drones get 20 to 30 percent of their pre-retirement pay. This is all going on while companies move as one toward "cash balance" plans for their peons that have the effect of slowing the growth of older workers' pensions or stopping it altogether.

There is a theme here that the corporate media chooses to miss even when it manages to report grim realities, such as a first-quarter aggregate economic growth rate of 4.8 percent while average wage growth of 0.7 percent fails to keep up with surging costs in housing, health care, and gasoline. Meanwhile, inflation-adjusted profits since the last quarter of 2001 shot up more than 50 percent, yet real wage income rose less than seven percent over the same period. What's even worse, the likelihood of workers experiencing sudden drastic drops in household income has been as bad during these years of "recovery" as it was during the 1990-91 recession. In short, the yachts at the top of a rising tide have been bobbing along merrily, but all around them millions of tiny boats have been sinking while millions of other boats are shipwrecked.

The Labor Department says that seven of the ten occupations expected to grow most rapidly between now and 2012 pay less than \$13.25 per hour. In 2004 nearly half of America's workers earned less than \$13.25 per hour. This wage compression has not come about because American workers lack skills and education. Rather, our workers are hurting because their wages are being pushed below their actual skill and productivity level by greed at the top, by rampant outsourcing,



graphic: Matt Wuerker

and by the shocking effect of Wal-Mart's "monopsony" throughout the economy, i.e., the ability of this giant retailer to ruin suppliers and their workforces. "Always Low Prices!" masks unspeakable destruction below the surface.

Our ancestors didn't take kindly to class war from above. Protection of all people from the impact of concentrated wealth lay at the heart of the nation's original "moral values." Our Founders could have been less entranced by John Locke's notion of the sanctity of private property and contract law, but they also recognized the latent despotism in too much property in the hands of monopolists. Madison denounced any concentration of economic power that could deny Americans "the free use of their faculties, and the free choice of their occupations."

Reagan and his corporate sponsors moved immediately to dismantle antitrust law and did so with barely a murmur of congressional or press protest. Japan was supposedly eating our lunch back then. Nothing could stand in the way of efforts by "our" corporations to fight back. Never mind that completely surrendering to the global competitiveness mantra would unleash a brutal reign of terror on small businesses, on unions, and on ordinary working families.

That reign of terror has been intensifying ever since. So how long will we tolerate such violence and such gross usurpations of our American liberties and birthright by those whom trust-buster Teddy Roosevelt called "malefactors of great wealth"?

Peter Laarman is Executive Director of Progressive Christians Uniting

How long will we tolerate such violence and such gross usurpations of our American liberties and birthright by those whom trust-buster Teddy Roosevelt called "malefactors of great wealth"?

Toward An Ecumenical Movement for Democratic Trade that Protects Communities and Nature

by Nancy Price

Since the "Battle in Seattle," the impact of "free trade" on jobs and wages in the U. S. is more commonly recognized and experienced. The general public, however, still has little understanding, of just how undemocratic, even, perhaps, unconstitutional, trade agreements are when multinational corporations can sue over laws that protect communities, public health, labor and the environment in order to promote corporate profits and investor rights. Is it possible, however, that the reality of global warming could be a catalyst that will bring people of many different political and religious ideologies together against "free trade"?

While scientists amass and analyze evidence for the causes and threats of global warming, people everywhere observe and experience real impacts. Arctic and Pacific Island communities have to abandon villages to thawing ice and rising seas. Subtle changes with cumulative impacts finally become apparent, such as earlier springtimes and migrations. Every example drives home the connection between people and nature and how we must break the strangle-hold corporate leaders and business groups have on national policy and politics.

Understanding the connection between people and nature was fundamental to the environmental movement of the 1960s and '70s. By the 1980s, however, James Watt and Ronald Reagan began to demonize environmentalists arguing that laws to protect people's health and the environment; federal public lands from private logging and mining; and endangered species from development were anti-American, anti-capitalist and anti-jobs. Environmentalists were labeled as liberals in contrast to conservatives who believed in no regulation, free markets and small government. As the evangelical community engaged with the conservative political movement, if you were for the environment you were against God.

Now, though, as Bill Moyers' show, *Is God Green?*, reports, "a new holy war is growing within the conservative evangelical community, with implications for both the global environment and American politics. For years liberal Christians and others have made protection of the environment a moral commitment. Now a number of conservative evangelicals are joining the fight, arguing that man's stewardship of the planet is a biblical imperative and calling for action to stop global warming." Today, then, we are witness to an emergent ecumenical



photo: ReligiousWitness.org

menical movement based on a concept of stewardship as many churches address global warming and its impact on people and the environment each from a different theological basis.

In this changing political reality, states are asserting their rights in the face of federal inaction on global warming. States recently highlighted this case by arguing before the Supreme Court that the Federal Environmental Protection Agency can regulate CO₂ emissions under the Clean Air Act. This action reveals the crisis in jurisdiction between the federal government's inaction due to corporate influence, on the one hand, and state governments that are responsive to public pressure, on the other hand.

Such a crisis is also fundamental to the free trade agreements that trump local, state and even national sovereignty over law-making and enforcement. How will CEOs of multinational corporations respond when communities, states and/or the federal government pass and/or enforce laws to curb global warming? How will religious principles of stewardship of the environment be enacted, if corporate profits and investor rights must be protected first? Could it be that many religious and political groups will come together in a broad ecumenical movement to take on corporate hegemony and rule and fight for democratic trade that respects the rights of communities and nature? If so, indeed, the implications for American politics will be profound.

Nancy Price is the Co-Chair of the Alliance for Democracy National Council and represents the AfD on the California Coalition for Fair Trade and Human Rights.

Conservative evangelicals are joining the fight, arguing that man's stewardship of the planet is a biblical imperative and calling for action to stop global warming.

"Is God Green?"

Last Fall, Bill Moyers' PBS special, *Is God Green?* sent shock waves through the Christian Faith. The promo for the show points out that:

"Is God Green?" explores how a serious split among conservative evangelicals over the environment and global warming could reshape American politics.

Check out this important program at www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/green/index.html You can get the transcript at www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/print/isgodgreen_transcript_print.htm

Beyond Capitalism: A Revolution of Values

by Nancy Price

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s most revolutionary 1967 speech "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence" marked his movement, from civil rights to a critique of capitalism, a year before he died.

Looking "beyond Vietnam," King questioned a US policy of interventions in foreign countries to defeat not only "Communist tyranny," but any opposition to the corporate-capitalist system of imperialism and oppression that protects corporate interests and the wealth and power of the ruling classes. "When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people," he said, "the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered."

He called for a "revolution of values," a shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. King envisioned "a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class, and nation." He cautioned: "a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

While "spiritual death" may be true for today's ruling, corporate and military elite, there is a vibrant spirit in the global ecojustice movement, which is calling for a revolution in values to rectify the climate and ecological crises as a matter of life over death.

Today's US ecojustice movement has rejected the regulatory approach of the traditional environmental movement that "permits" corporate harm to people's health and the environment. It includes the 1980s environmental justice focus on race and class that criticized siting toxic dumps, incinerators, and factories in low-income and minority communities.

The ecojustice movement advocates that solutions to climate change can not be only technical

(the reduction of atmospheric concentrations of CO₂), but must replace the economic system King deplored with a system based on human rights, equity and democratic participation.

The values of this new economic system are embodied in the concept of "living well" adopted in the new 2009 Bolivian Constitution and the "People's Accord" of the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (Bolivia, April 2009).

The "Declaration" adopted by the Ecojustice People's Movement Assembly at the US Social Forum, June 25, states: "We support the conclusion that only by 'living well,' in harmony with each other and with Mother Earth, rather than 'living better,' based on an economic system of unlimited growth, dominance and exploitation, will the people of this planet not only survive but thrive."

We realize that our global climate and local neighborhoods are both important parts of "the commons" and a vital part of our natural world. Recognizing and reclaiming our "commons" is fundamental to King's revolution in values and the ecojustice movement's call for "living well."

It is not just the climate and ecological crisis that brings new focus to the concept of "the commons" as it applies to nature. At this stage of globalization, when corporate CEOs and others want to commodify, privatize and profit from almost every aspect of nature and cultural creation, people are asking: What should be part of "the commons"? There is a long legal and cultural history concerning what aspects of nature are considered public or private property or "held in common" for common use. We must ask ourselves: "What legal and other strategies can we use to "reclaim" the commons that have been "enclosed" or taken for private use by corporations and the wealthy for profit? How do we return these "commons"—for example oil fields, forests, and water resources—to the public, while conserving them for future generations? What principles apply to the use, the sharing, or the distribution of income from "the commons"?"

These are all aspects to consider as we undertake a non-violent revolution of values to move beyond capitalism.

Nancy Price is the Co-Chair of the Alliance for Democracy and Western Coordinator of AfD's Defending Water for Life Campaign. She also offers workshops on the Tapestry of the Commons Project (see inside cover). To arrange a Teacher Workshop, or a presentation at your school or for your community organization, email nancytprice@juno.com or call Barbara Clancy at the AfD office: 1-781-894-1179.

Only by 'living well', in harmony with each other and with Mother Earth, rather than 'living better,' based on an economic system of unlimited growth, dominance and exploitation, will the people of this planet not only survive but thrive.





Thomas Berry & Rights for Nature

Human rights do not cancel out the rights of other modes of being to exist in their natural state.

Legal rights for nature are entwined with Thomas Berry's vision of a mutually enhancing Earth Community. A Catholic monk and cultural historian (he calls himself a "geologist" rather than a theologian), Berry lists ten basic precepts to explain why rights are not a human concept, but a universal reality for all of nature.

1. Rights originate where existence originates. That which determines existence determines rights.
2. Since it has no further context of existence in the phenomenal order, the universe is self-referent in its being and self-normative in its activities. It is also the primary referent in the being and activities of all derivative modes of being. (This means the Universe determines all aspects of existence.)
3. The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects. As subjects, the component members of the universe are capable of having rights.
4. The natural world on the planet Earth gets its rights from the same source that humans get their rights, from the universe that brought them into being.
5. Every component of the Earth community has three rights: the right to be, the right to habitat, and the right to fulfill its role in the ever-renewing processes of the Earth community.
6. All rights are species specific and limited. Rivers have river rights.

Dedication to *The Great Work*

To the children,
To all the children
To the children who swim beneath
The waves of the sea, to those who live in
The soils of the Earth, to the children of the flowers
In the meadows and the trees in the forest, to
All those children who roam over the land
And the winged ones who fly with the winds,
To the human children too, that all the children
May go together into the future in the full
Diversity of their regional communities.

—Thomas Berry

Birds have bird rights. Insects have insect rights. Differences in rights is qualitative, not quantitative. The rights of an insect would be of no value to a tree or a fish.

7. Human rights do not cancel out the rights of other modes of being to exist in their natural state. Human property rights are not absolute. Property rights are simply a special relationship between a particular human "owner" and a particular piece of "property" so that both might fulfill their roles in the great community of existence.
8. Since species exist only in the form of individuals, rights refer to individuals and to their natural groupings of individuals into flocks, herds, packs, not simply in a general way to species.
9. These rights as presented here are based upon the intrinsic relations that the various components of Earth have to each other. The planet Earth is a single community bound together with interdependent relationships. No living being nourishes itself. Each component of the Earth community is immediately or mediately dependent on every other member of the community for the nourishment and assistance it needs for its own survival. This mutual nourishment, which includes the predator-prey relationships, is integral with the role that each component of the Earth has within the comprehensive community of existence.
10. In a special manner humans have not only a need for but a right of access to the natural world to provide not only the physical need of humans but also the wonder needed by human intelligence, the beauty needed by human imagination, and the intimacy needed by human emotions for fulfillment.

To explore how these precepts would work within legal systems, Thomas Berry worked with lawyer Cormac Cullinan on his book *Wild Law*. Cullinan explains, "Fundamentally changing our governance systems will require more than reforming existing laws or making new ones. We need to take a long hard look, not only at our legal systems, but, more importantly, at the legal philosophies that underlie them. Only by creating a vision of an 'Earth Jurisprudence' will we be able to begin a comprehensive transformation of our governance system."

Thomas Berry's books include *Dream of the Earth*, *The Universe Story* (co-authored with cosmologist Brian Swimme) and *The Great Work*. Cormac Cullinan's book, *Wild Law*, is available in the US at www.100fires.com

Jan Edwards is the creator of the "Tapestry of the Commons" which is online at www.TheAllianceForDemocracy.org. She is a member of the Redwood Coast Chapter of the AfD.

Coming Back to Life

by Dean Paton editor of *Yes Magazine*

From the Spring 2015 *Yes Magazine*, *Together with the Earth*

More and more people have come to understand that behaving as if they hold all rights to Earth's bounty amounts to an eighth deadly sin.



Robertson Stream. Photo by Billy Wilson / Flickr.

For most of the existence of the human species, we lived in balance with nature, using resources lightly, and acknowledging our kinship with Earth and with other living beings. With the advent of agriculture and organized religion, we began to lose touch with that ancient way of life, and to believe that we lived in opposition to nature; that we could bring Earth under our control.

It was a perfect storm of science, religion, and capitalism.

This process accelerated as the Scientific Revolution unfolded. René Descartes' ideas are an example of the thinking that led us away from our relationship to Earth. Early in the 17th century, he declared that nature is inert, lifeless, devoid of soul or consciousness and animals have no emotions, feel no pain, and are, essentially, machines. Such ideas helped redefine the natural world as a collection of mere resources ready to be exploited.

It was an ideal foundation for the 19th century's Industrial Revolution, which fueled exponential growth by extracting increasing amounts of Earth's resources, denuding landscapes, and laying waste to the planet at a scale never before imagined.

Western religious authorities quoted scripture to prove their God had given humans dominion over nature. It was a perfect storm of science, religion, and capitalism.

In the last few decades, more and more people have come to understand why behaving as if they hold all rights to Earth's bounty amounts to an eighth deadly sin. Our goal now should be to continue moving toward critical mass—picture billions of people proclaiming their relationship with Earth to be mutual, where humans are a part of nature, not apart from nature and working with Earth to preserve life, not extinguish it.

Behaving as if they hold all rights to Earth's bounty amounts to an eighth deadly sin.

Earth has always had its champions: whole cultures of indigenous peoples, along with visionary environmentalists (think Ansel Adams, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey). Yet it wasn't until isolated concern for the environment became a mass movement that an alternative to our market-based model of exponentially exploiting Earth became conceivable. For along with the Clean Water Act, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Clamshell Alliance—and a profusion of related laws, organizations, and grassroots resisters—there emerged the beginnings of a new consciousness, one that blends indigenous intelligence with an awareness of the 21st century's multiple ecological crises.

Bigger Than Science, Bigger Than Religion

by Richard Schiffman

From the Spring 2015 Yes Magazine, Together with the Earth

We're closer to environmental disaster than ever before.

We need a new story for our relationship with the Earth, one that goes beyond science and religion.



Genesis Farm, an environmental learning center and working biodynamic farm grounded in the vision of Thomas Berry. Photo by Stephen O'Byrne / YES!

The world as we know it is slipping away. At the current rate of destruction, tropical rainforest could be gone within as little as 40 years. The seas are being overfished to the point of exhaustion, and coral reefs are dying from ocean acidification. Biologists say that we are currently at the start of the largest mass extinction event since the disappearance of the dinosaurs. As greenhouse gases increasingly accumulate in the atmosphere, temperatures are likely to rise faster than our current ecological and agricultural systems can adapt.

It is no secret that the Earth is in trouble and that we humans are to blame. Just knowing these grim facts, however, won't get us very far. We have to transform this knowledge into a deep passion to change course. But passion does not come primarily from the head; it is a product of the heart. And the heart is not aroused by the bare facts alone. It needs stories that weave those facts into a moving and meaningful narrative.

We need a powerful new story that we are a part of nature and not separate from it. We need a story that properly situates humans in the world—neither above it by virtue of our superior intellect, nor dwarfed by the universe into cosmic insignificance. We are equal partners with all that exists, co-creators with trees and galaxies and the microorganisms in our own gut, in a materially and spiritually evolving universe.

This was the breathtaking vision of the late Father Thomas Berry. Berry taught that humanity is presently at a critical decision point. Either we develop a more heart-full relationship with the Earth that sustains us, or we destroy ourselves and life on the planet. I interviewed the white-maned theologian (he preferred the term “geologian,” by which he meant “student of the Earth”) in 1997 at the Riverdale Center of Religious Research on the Hudson River north of New York City. Berry spoke slowly and with the hint of a southern drawl, revealing his North Carolina upbringing.

“I say that my generation has been autistic,” he told me. “An autistic child is locked into themselves, they cannot get out and the outer world cannot get in. They cannot receive affection, cannot give affection. And this is, I think, a very appropriate way of identifying this generation in its relationship to the natural world.

“We have no feeling for the natural world. We'd as soon cut down our most beautiful tree, the most beautiful forest in

the world. We cut it down for what? For timber, for board feet. We don't see the tree, we only see it in terms of its commercial value."

It is no accident that we have come to our current crisis, according to Berry. Rather, it is the natural consequence of certain core cultural beliefs that comprise what Berry called "the Old Story." At the heart of the Old Story is the idea that we humans are set apart from nature and here to conquer it. Berry cited the teaching in Genesis that humans should "subdue the Earth ... and have dominion over every living thing."

But if religion provided the outline for the story, science wrote it large—developing a mind-boggling mastery of the natural world. Indeed, science over time became the new religion, said Berry, an idolatrous worship of our own human prowess. Like true believers, many today are convinced that, however bad things might seem, science and technology will eventually solve all of our problems and fulfill all of our needs.

Berry acknowledged that this naive belief in science served a useful purpose during the formative era when we were still building the modern world and becoming aware of our immense power to transform things.

Like adolescents staking out their own place in the world, we asserted our independence from nature and the greater family of life. But over time, this self-assertion became unbalanced, pushing the Earth to the brink of environmental cataclysm. The time has come to leave this adolescent stage behind, said Berry, and develop a new, mature relationship with the Earth and its inhabitants.

We'll need to approach this crucial transition on many different fronts. Scientific research has too frequently become the willing handmaiden of what Berry called "the extractive economy," an economic system that treats our fellow creatures as objects to be exploited rather than as living beings with their own awareness and rights. Moreover, technology, in Berry's view, potentially separates us from intimacy with life. We flee into "cyberspace"—spending more time on smart phones, iPods, and video games than communing with the real world.

Science and technology are not the problem. Our misuse of them is. Berry said that science needs to acknowledge that the universe is not a random assemblage of dead matter and empty space, but is alive, intelligent, and continually evolving. And it needs to recognize that not only is the world alive, it is alive in us. "We bear the universe in our beings," Berry reflected, "as the universe bears us in its being." In Berry's view, our human lives are no accident. We are the eyes, the minds, and the hearts that the cosmos is evolving so that it can come to know itself ever more perfectly through us.

It's a view that has been winning some surprising adherents. Several years ago, I had dinner with Edgar Mitchell, one of only a dozen humans who have walked upon the lunar surface. Mitchell, the descendant of New Mexico pioneers and an aeronautical engineer by training, spoke precisely and almost clinically—until he related an experience that happened on his way back to Earth during the Apollo 14 mission. At that point, his voice brightened with awe.

"I was gazing out of the window, at the Earth, moon, sun, and star-studded blackness of space in turn as our capsule slowly rotated," he said. "Gradually, I was flooded with the ecstatic awareness that I was a part of what I was observing. Every molecule in my body was birthed in a star hanging in space. I became aware that everything that exists is part of one intricately interconnected whole."

The Overview Effect

In a recent phone chat, Mitchell called this realization "the Overview Effect," and he said that virtually all of the moon astronauts experienced it during their flights. In his case, it changed the direction of his life: "I realized that the story of ourselves as told by our scientific cosmology and our religion was incomplete and likely flawed. I saw that the Newtonian idea of separate, independent, discrete things in the universe wasn't a fully accurate description."

In pursuit of a holistic understanding, Mitchell founded the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) to explore the nature of human consciousness. The question of consciousness might seem remote from issues like climate change. But it is central to the question of how we treat the world. At the core of our abuse of nature is the belief that we humans are essentially islands unto ourselves, alienated from the world beyond our skins. A little god locked within the gated community of his or her own skull won't feel much responsibility for what goes on outside.

"The classical scientific approach says that observation and consciousness are completely independent of the way the world works," IONS Chief Scientist Dean Radin told me. But physics has known for decades that mind and matter are not as separable as we once supposed. Radin cites as an example Heisenberg's discovery that the act of observation changes the phenomenon that is being observed.

Moreover, quantum physics has shown that subatomic particles that are separated in space are nevertheless responsive to one another in ways that are not yet fully understood. We are discovering that there is "some underlying form of connection in which literally everything is connected to everything else all of the time," asserts Radin. "The universe is less a collection of objects than a web of interrelationships."

As we come to grasp how inextricably embedded in this vast web of cosmic life we are, Radin hopes that humans will be persuaded to move beyond the idea of ourselves as masters and the world as slave to embrace an equal and mutually beneficial partnership.

Another prophet of a new scientific paradigm is renowned Harvard biologist Edward (E.O.) Wilson. Wilson is best

known for his biophilia hypothesis, which says there is an instinctive emotional bond between humans and other life forms. Evolution has fostered in us the drive to love and care for other living beings, Wilson says, as a way to promote the survival not just of our own kind but of life as a whole.

Darwin's theory of natural selection is invoked to argue that we humans are conditioned by nature to struggle tooth and nail for access to limited resources. But Wilson contends that evolution does not just promote violent competition but also favors the development of compassion and cooperation—traits that serve the interests of the group as a whole.

He calls this radical new idea “group selection.” Groups of altruistically inclined individuals have an evolutionary advantage over groups that are composed of members pursuing only their own survival needs. This collective advantage, he argues, has helped to promote powerful social bonds and cooperative behaviors in species as diverse as ants, geese, elk, and human beings.

In championing the evolutionary importance of love and cooperation in the flourishing of life, Wilson is not just revolutionizing biology. He is also venturing into territory usually occupied by religion. But, like Berry, Wilson argues that we need a story that cuts across traditional boundaries between fields to present a new, integral vision. “Science and religion are two of the most potent forces on Earth,” Wilson asserts, “and they should come together to save the Creation.”

A thousand-year worldview

At its heart, the new story that Wilson and Berry advocate is actually a very old one. Indigenous spiritual traditions taught that all beings are our relatives long before the science of ecology “discovered” the seamless web of life that binds humans to other creatures. “The world is alive, everything has spirit, has standing, has the right to be recognized,” proclaims Anishinaabe activist and former Green Party candidate for vice president Winona LaDuke.

“One of our fundamental teachings is that in all our actions we consider the impact it will have on seven generations,” LaDuke told an audience at the University of Ottawa in 2012. “Think about what it would mean to have a worldview that could last a thousand years, instead of the current corporate mindset that can't see beyond the next quarterly earnings statement.”

When LaDuke speaks of Native values, people sometimes ask her what relevance these have for us today. She answers that the respect for the sacredness of nature that inspired people to live in harmony with their environment for millennia is not a relic of the past. It is a roadmap for living lightly on the Earth that we desperately need in a time of climate change.

This ethic has spread beyond the reservation into religiously inspired communities, like Genesis Farm, founded by the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, New Jersey. Set on ancestral Lenape lands amidst wooded hills and wetlands and within view of the Delaware Water Gap, Genesis has served for the last quarter century as an environmental learning center and working biodynamic farm grounded in Berry's vision.

I spoke to the community's founder Sister Miriam MacGillis, a friend and student of Berry, in a room studded with satellite images of the farm and its bioregion. MacGillis told me that she underwent decades of struggle trying to reconcile Berry's 13-billion-year vision of an evolutionary cosmos with the ultimately incompatible biblical teachings that “creation is finished: Humans were made, history began, there was the fall, and history will end with the apocalypse.” She says, “The pictures I had of God were too small, too parochial, too much a reflection of the ways humans think. We made God in our image!”

Taking the long view fundamentally transforms the basis for environmental action, says MacGillis: “We need to realize that we are the universe in the form of the human. We are not just on Earth to do good ecological things. That is where the religious perspective takes us with the stewardship model—take care of it; it's holy because God made it. That hasn't worked real well ... The idea of stewardship is too small, it's too human-centered, like we can do that. It's really the opposite. Earth is taking total care of us.”

Genesis Farm has propagated these ideas through its Earth Literacy training, which has now spread to many places throughout the world. Their work is a small part of a larger greening of religion, says Yale religious scholar Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-creator with Brian Swimme of *Journey of the Universe*, an exhilarating trek through time and space portraying an evolutionary universe.

Tucker expects that the upcoming encyclical on climate change and the environment that Pope Francis will issue in early 2015 will be “a game changer” for Catholics. She adds that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has also been outspoken, labeling crimes against the natural world “a sin.” The Dalai Lama, for his part, has been speaking about the importance of safeguarding the environment based on Buddhism's sense of the profound interdependence of all life. China has recently enshrined in its constitution the need for a new ecological civilization rooted in Confucian values, which preach the harmony between humans, Earth, and Heaven.

“All civilizations have drawn on the wisdom traditions that have gotten people through death, tragedy, destruction, immense despair,” says Tucker, adding that we are currently in a perilous rite of passage. “We will need all of the world's religions to help as well as a shared sense of an evolutionary story to get us through this.”

Richard Schiffman wrote this for Together, With Earth, the Spring 2015 issue of YES! Magazine. Richard is an environmental journalist whose work has been featured on National Public Radio, in The Guardian, The Atlantic, and many other publications. He is the author of two biographies, and a poet whose collection What the Dust Doesn't Know is forthcoming from Salmon Poetry.

When the Grandmothers Awoke

by Jennifer Browdy

From the Spring 2015 *Yes Magazine*, *Together with the Earth*

Becoming a global family, one that unites ancient indigenous wisdom with other faith and cultural traditions, is essential if humanity is to overcome the crises of climate change.



Photo by Jane Feldman.

This was the impetus behind the journey of a group of healers, educators, and activists, predominantly women, from a variety of ethnicities including Hopi, Ojibwe, and Maori and from religious traditions as diverse as Sufi, Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist. They traveled together last

summer to share their traditions and cultural stories, both among themselves and with the people they visited, in order to create a common understanding of how humans relate to one another, to other living beings, and to the Earth.

The journey was inspired by a meeting in New Zealand between Maori spiritual leader Rangimarie Turuki Rose Pere and Sufi healer Devi Tide. Tide recalls Pere saying, “We’ve come to a place where we’re all in it together, we can no longer separate ourselves from each other. It’s a time of unity, a time for the indigenous wisdom-keepers to share our knowledge with the rest of the world.”

Tide tried to persuade Pere to travel and share her wisdom herself, but Pere had other ideas. “She turned around and pointed at me,” Tide recalls, “and she said, ‘It can’t come from one of us,’” referring to the Maori and other indigenous peoples. When Pere said that Tide should be the one to bring the wisdom-keepers of the world together, Tide said, “I felt like I had been hit by a bolt of lightning.”

That lightning bolt sparked the remarkable journey she led through the American Southwest, and then to New York City just in time for the People’s Climate March and the United Nations First World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

The group met with Grandmother Flordemayo of the Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, an international alliance of indigenous women elders founded in 2004 and dedicated to offering prayer and education as a means to strengthen the human family “for the next seven generations.”

Becoming a new kind of family, Taiha said, one that unites ancient indigenous wisdom with other faith and cultural traditions, is essential if humanity is to successfully surmount the crises of the present moment. Seeking to share perspectives and wisdom, the travelers visited the Hopi Reservation under the guidance of Hopi elder Pershlie “Perci” Ami and prayed at sacred sites like the Hopi Prophecy Rock, Sedona, and the Grand Canyon. “It was chaos and miracles, every day,” said Moetu Taiha, a Maori healer who helped lead the group. “It was like a kind of rebirth. We had to learn how to be a family.”

The global human family was very much in evidence at the People’s Climate March in New York City on September 21, 2014, where some 400,000 people from every background imaginable gathered to send a message to world leaders that they must act immediately and decisively to shift human civilization onto a sustainable course.

In New York, the wisdom-keepers offered prayers for the healing of the Earth, first in a small ceremony in Central Park, and later center stage at the start of the huge rally. Their passion was mirrored by the great crowd in front of them.

“That moment in New York was the beginning of a new stage of unity,” Ojibwe elder Mary Lyons said. “Now, finally, we are walking a pathway for peace together,” toward a new understanding of the important role of human beings, particularly women, as stewards of life on Earth.

Jennifer Browdy, Ph.D., teaches comparative literature and media studies at Bard College at Simon’s Rock, focusing on women’s narratives of social and ecological justice. She is founding director of the Berkshire Festival of Women Writers and editor of two anthologies of African, Latin American, and Caribbean women’s writing of resistance.

Deep in the Amazon, a Tiny Tribe Is Beating Big Oil: A Fight for Life

by David Goodman

From the Spring 2015 *Yes Magazine*, *Together with the Earth*

The people of Sarayaku are a leading force in 21st century indigenous resistance, engaging the western world politically, legally, and philosophically.

Patricia Gualinga stands serenely as chaos swirls about her. I find this petite woman with striking black and red face paint at the head of the People's Climate March in New York City on September 21, 2014. She is adorned with earrings made of brilliant bird feathers and a thick necklace of yellow and blue beads. She has come here from Sarayaku, a community deep in the heart of the Amazon rainforest in Ecuador.

Behind Gualinga, 400,000 people are in the streets calling for global action to stop climate change. Beside her, celebrities Leonardo DiCaprio, Sting, and Mark Ruffalo prepare to lead the historic march alongside a group of indigenous leaders. Gualinga stands beneath a sign, "Keep the Oil in the Ground." She has traveled across continents and cultures to deliver this message.

"Our ancestors and our spiritual leaders have been talking about climate change for a long time," she tells me in Spanish above the din, flashing a soft smile as photographers crush around the celebrities. She motions to the throngs around her. "We are actually speaking the same language right now."

A year earlier, I traveled to her village in the Ecuadorian Amazon to research the improbable story of a rainforest community of 1,200 Kichwa people that has successfully fended off oil companies and a government intent on exploiting their land for profit. How, I wondered, has Sarayaku been winning?

This is not the story most people know from Ecuador. Headlines have focused on northern Ecuador, where Chevron is fighting a landmark \$9.5 billion judgment for dumping millions of gallons of toxic wastewater into rivers and leaving unlined pits of contaminated sludge that poisoned thousands of people.

Sarayaku lies in southern Ecuador, where the government is selling drilling rights to a vast swath of indigenous lands—except for Sarayaku. The community has become a beacon of hope to other indigenous groups and to global climate change activists as it mobilizes to stop a new round of oil exploration.

What I found in Sarayaku was not just a community defending its territory. I encountered a people who believe that their lifestyle, deeply connected to nature, holds promise for humans to save themselves from global warming and extinction. They are fighting back by advancing a counter-capitalist vision called *sumak kawsay*—Kichwa for "living well"—living in harmony with the natural world and insisting that nature has rights deserving of protection.

Naively romantic? Think again: In 2008, Ecuador's constitution became the first in the world to codify the rights of nature and specifically *sumak kawsay*. Bolivia's constitution has a similar provision, and rights-of-nature ordinances are now being passed in communities in the United States.

Sarayaku residents describe *sumak kawsay* as "choosing our responsibility to the seventh generation over quarterly earnings, regeneration over economic growth, and the pursuit of well-being and harmony over wealth and financial success."

The people of Sarayaku are the face of 21st-century indigenous resistance. Sarayaku may be a remote, pastoral community, but it is engaging the Western world politically, legally, and philosophically. Patricia Gualinga and other Sarayaku community members have traveled to Europe to meet with foreign leaders and warn energy company executives about their opposition to oil extraction from their lands, produced their own documentary film about their struggle, filed lawsuits, leveraged their message with international groups such as Amazon Watch and Amnesty International, marched thousands of kilometers in public protest, and testified at the United Nations. Sarayaku's resistance has angered the pro-development Ecuadorian government—which bizarrely hails *sumak kawsay* while selling hotly contested oil drilling leases—but has inspired other indigenous communities across the globe.



Nina Gualinga, Sarayaku resident and international activist on indigenous rights, traveling on the Bobonaza River, Sarayaku, Ecuador. Photo by Caroline Bennett / Amazon Watch.

Defending life and land

I climb aboard a four-seater Cessna parked at a small airstrip in the town of Shell, a rambling settlement on the edge of the Amazon rainforest in southeastern Ecuador. The town is named for Shell Oil Company, which established operations here a half century ago. Our plane flies low over the thick green jungle. The dense growth below is broken only by rivers the color of chocolate milk, the sinewy arteries of the rainforest.

The forest canopy parts to reveal a grass airstrip and clusters of thatched huts. This is Sarayaku. Moist jungle air envelops me as I step out of the plane. The villagers escort me and my daughter, Ariel, who has been living in Ecuador and is translating for me, past a large communal hut where a woman tends a small fire. Gerardo Gualinga, Patricia's brother and one of the community leaders, arrives dressed in jeans, a T-shirt, and knee-high rubber boots, the signature footwear of the rainforest. He carries a tall, carved wooden staff, a symbol of his authority.

"The community is in the middle of a three-day meeting to plan our political and development work for the next year. Come along—I think you will find it interesting," he says, motioning for us to follow him down to the edge of the broad Bobonaza River.

We board a motorized canoe and head upstream, passing slender dugouts propelled by men pushing long poles. In 10 minutes, we clamber out on the river bank and hike up to a sandy village square. Inside an oval building with a thatched roof, we find José Gualinga, another of Patricia's brothers, who was then president of Sarayaku. He is holding his ceremonial staff and wearing a black headband and a Che Guevara T-shirt. Gualinga is leading a discussion of how the community should pressure the Ecuadorian government to comply with the judgment of the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, which ruled in 2012 that the Ecuadorian government should have obtained the consent of the native people when it permitted oil drilling on Sarayaku's territory. Following hearings in Costa Rica, the court ordered the government to apologize and pay Sarayaku \$1.25 million, plus attorney's fees.

The court decision, declared Mario Melo, attorney for Sarayaku from the Quito-based Fundación Pachamama, is "a significant contribution to a more profound safeguard of indigenous peoples' rights, and it is an example of dignity that will surely inspire many other nations and peoples around the world."

At a lunch break, Mario Santi, Sarayaku's president until 2008, explains the history of the struggle here. "In the early 2000s, 'The government let oil businesses exploit and explore for oil in this territory. There was no consultation. Many communities sold out to the oil companies. Sarayaku was the only pueblo that didn't sell the right for oil companies to explore.'"

Ecuador's government ignored the community's refusal to sell oil-drilling rights and signed a contract in 1996 with the Argentinian oil company C.G.C. to explore for oil in Sarayaku. In 2003, C.G.C. petroleros—oil workers and private security guards—and Ecuadorian soldiers came by helicopter to lay explosives and dig test wells.

Sarayaku mobilized. "We stopped the schools and our own work and dedicated ourselves to the struggle for six months," says Santi. As the oil workers cleared a large area of forest—which was community farmland—the citizens of Sarayaku retreated deep into the jungle, where they established emergency camps and plotted their resistance.

"In the six months of struggle, there was torture, rape, and strong suffering of our people, especially our mothers and children," Santi recounts. "We returned with psychological illness. All the military who came ..." He pauses to compose himself. "This was a very, very bad time."

In their jungle camps, the Sarayaku leaders hatched a plan. The women of the community prepared a strong batch of chicha, the traditional Ecuadorian homebrew made from fermented cassava. One night, a group of them traveled stealthily through the jungle, shadowed by men of the village. The women emerged at the main encampment of the petroleros. They offered their chicha and watched as the oil workers happily partied.

As their drinking binge ended, the petroleros fell asleep. When they awoke, what they saw sobered them: They were staring into the muzzles of their own automatic weapons. Wielding the guns were the women and men of Sarayaku.

The Sarayaku residents ordered the petroleros off their ancestral land. The terrified workers called in helicopters and fled, abandoning their weapons. The oil workers never returned. An Ecuadorian general came later and negotiated with community leaders—five of whom had been arrested and beaten—for the return of the weapons.

I ask Santi why Sarayaku has resisted. His tan, weathered face breaks into a gentle smile even as he recounts a difficult story.

"Our fathers told us that for future generations not to suffer, we needed to struggle for our territory and our liberty. So we wouldn't be slaves of the new kind of colonization.

"The waterfall, the insects, the animals, the jungle gives us life," he tells me. "Because man and the jungle have a relationship. For the Western capitalist world, the jungle is simply for exploiting resources and ending all this. The indigenous pueblos without jungle—we can't live."

Sarayaku now wants to help indigenous people around the world resist and defend their way of life. "Our message that we are also taking to Asia, Africa, Brazil, and other countries that are discussing climate change, we propose an alternative development—the development of life. This is our economy for living—sumak kawsay—not just for us but for the Western world. They don't have to be afraid of global warming if they support the life of the jungle.

"It's not a big thing," he says understatedly. "It's just to continue living."

Indigenous climate change warriors

The Sarayaku story is just the latest in a long-running battle over Ecuador's natural resources. Oil extraction began in northern Ecuador in 1964, when the American oil giant Texaco set up drilling operations in indigenous lands (Chevron later

purchased Texaco). When the oil company exited in 1992, it “left behind the worst oil-related environmental disaster on the planet,” according to Amazon Watch, a nonprofit organization that defends indigenous rights. The devastated and poisoned region is known as the “rainforest Chernobyl.”

Despite pursuing Chevron for damages, the Ecuadorian government of President Rafael Correa has embarked on an aggressive new round of oil development in southern Ecuador, opening thousands of acres to exploration. The government has cracked down on resisters, recently ordering the closure of the Quito headquarters of CONAIE, Ecuador’s national indigenous organization, attempting to stop Ecuadorian activists opposed to oil drilling from attending a U.N. climate summit in Peru, and closing Fundación Pachamama, an NGO supporting indigenous groups. Most of Sarayaku’s land has been excluded in the new round of oil drilling, though nearby communities, including those of the neighboring Sápara people, are threatened. Sarayaku is joining the protests of its neighbors.

José Gualinga says these struggles have bigger implications. “We are doing this to stop carbon emissions and global warming. This struggle of indigenous pueblos is a doorway to saving Pachamama [Mother Earth].”

Women have been at the center of the indigenous resistance. Patricia Gualinga tells me, “The women have been very steadfast and strong in saying we are not negotiating about this. We are the ones who have mobilized for life.” She recounts how, in 2013, 100 women from seven different indigenous groups marched 250 kilometers from their jungle communities to Quito, where they addressed the National Assembly. In the 1990s, Patricia’s mother embarked on a similar march with thousands of other indigenous women.

Sarayaku community members travel widely around Ecuador and beyond, but most return to their pastoral village.

“We want to continue living a good life within the forest,” Patricia tells me. “We want to be respected, and we want to be a model that could be replicated.”

The living jungle

I follow Sabino Gualinga, a 70-year-old shaman, as he walks lightly through the dense tangle of growth. He deftly flicks his machete to make a path through the jungle for me and Ariel. He stops and points up toward a tree.

“The bark of that tree helps cure gripe [flu]. This one,” he says, pointing to a weathered, gray tree trunk, “helps to break a fever. That one,” he motions to a fern-like plant, “helps with psychological problems.”

That night, Sabino’s sons, Gerardo and José, join us in front of a flickering fire to talk about Sarayaku’s journey. They are unwinding after a long day of meetings. José wears a white soccer jersey and his long black hair hangs loosely at his shoulders.

José, president of Sarayaku from 2011 to 2014, led his community to take its fight to the Inter-American Court on Human Rights. Part of the court judgment required Ecuadorian government leaders to apologize to Sarayaku. I doubted this would occur, but José was insistent that it would.

In October 2014, Ecuador’s Minister of Justice, Ledy Zuniga, stood in Sarayaku’s sandy community square and delivered an extraordinary message: “We offer a public apology for the violation of indigenous property, cultural identity, the right to consultation, having put at serious risk their lives and personal integrity, and for the violation of the right to judicial guarantee and judicial protections,” she declared.

The court decision and official apology appear to have given Sarayaku an extra measure of protection from new oil exploration. The government must now secure at least the appearance of consent, contested though it may be, lest they get dragged back into court.

“We’ve shown that laws can change,” reflects Gerardo. “We’ve won not only for Sarayaku, we’ve won for South America.”

A key element in Sarayaku’s success is telling its story everywhere it can. Sarayaku resident Eriberto Gualinga trained in videography and made a film about his community, *Children of the Jaguar*, which won best documentary at the 2012 National Geographic All Roads Film Festival. Sarayaku has also embraced social media. Community members showed me to a thatched hut. Inside, young people were clustered around several computers updating Facebook pages and websites via a satellite Internet connection.

Now, says José, “When the state says, ‘Sarayaku, we are going to destroy you,’ we have international witnesses. We can tell people the truth.” José draws a distinction between Sarayaku’s struggles and those led by leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Che Guevara. “They wanted their freedom. We don’t need to win our freedom. Here in Sarayaku, we are free. But we take from the experience of these leaders. It strengthens us.”

A steady rain falls on the thatched roof overhead. The fat raindrops make a hard thwack on the broad leaves of the trees. A guitarist strums softly in another hut. Chickens and children run free. “We are millionaires,” says Gerardo, motioning to the jungle that embraces us. “Everything we need we have here.” José peers into the fire. “We are a small pueblo, but we are a symbol of life. Everyone must come together to support the life of human beings and Earth.”

David is a journalist, a contributing writer for Mother Jones, and author of 10 books. He and his sister Amy Goodman, host of Democracy Now!, have co-authored three New York Times bestsellers.

IT: Alternative Grammar A New Language of Kinship

by Robin Wall

From the Spring 2015 Yes Magazine , Together with the Earth



Photo from Shutterstock. Robin Wall Kimmerer

Calling the natural world “it” absolves us of moral responsibility and opens the door to exploitation. Here’s what we can say instead.

Singing whales, talking trees, dancing bees, birds who make art, fish who navigate, plants who learn and remember. We are surrounded by intelligences other than our own, by feathered people and people with leaves. But we’ve forgotten. There are many forces arrayed to help us forget—even the language we speak.

I’m a beginning student of my native Anishinaabe language, trying to reclaim what was washed from the mouths of children in the Indian Boarding Schools. Children like my grandfather. So I’m paying a lot of attention to grammar lately. Grammar is how we chart relationships through language, including our relationship with the Earth.

Imagine your grandmother standing at the stove in her apron and someone says, “Look, it is making soup. It has gray hair.” We might snicker at such a mistake; at the same time we recoil. In English, we never refer to a person as “it.” Such a grammatical error would be a profound act of disrespect. “It” robs a person of selfhood and kinship, reducing a person to a thing.

And yet in English, we speak of our beloved Grandmother Earth in exactly that way: as “it.” The language allows no form of respect for the more-than-human beings with whom we share the Earth. In English, a being is either a human or an “it.”

Objectification of the natural world reinforces the notion that our species is somehow more deserving of the gifts of the world than the other 8.7 million species with whom we share the planet. Using “it” absolves us of moral responsibility and opens the door to exploitation. When Sugar Maple is an “it” we give ourselves permission to pick up the saw. “It” means it doesn’t matter.

But in Anishinaabe and many other indigenous languages, it’s impossible to speak of Sugar Maple as “it.” We use the same words to address all living beings as we do our family. Because they are our family. What would it feel like to be part of a family that includes birches and beavers and butterflies? We’d be less lonely. We’d feel like we belonged. We’d be smarter.

In indigenous ways of knowing, other species are recognized not only as persons, but also as teachers who can inspire how we might live. We can learn a new solar economy from plants, medicines from mycelia, and architecture from the ants. By learning from other species, we might even learn humility.

Colonization, we know, attempts to replace indigenous cultures with the culture of the settler. One of its tools is linguistic imperialism, or the overwriting of language and names. Among the many examples of linguistic imperialism, perhaps none is more pernicious than the replacement of the language of nature as subject with the language of nature as object. We can see the consequences all around us as we enter an age of extinction precipitated by how we think and how we live.

Let me make here a modest proposal for the transformation of the English language, a kind of reverse linguistic imperialism, a shift in worldview through the humble work of the pronoun. Might the path to sustainability be marked by grammar?

Language has always been changeable and adaptive. We lose words we don’t need anymore and invent the ones we need. We don’t need a worldview of Earth beings as objects anymore. That thinking has led us to the precipice of climate chaos and mass extinction. We need a new language that reflects the life-affirming world we want. A new language, with its roots in an ancient way of thinking.

If sharing is to happen, it has to be done right, with mutual respect. So, I talked to my elders. I was pointedly reminded that our language carries no responsibility to heal the society that systematically sought to exterminate it. At the same time, others counsel that “the reason we have held on to our traditional teachings is because one day, the whole world will need them.” I think that both are true.

English is a secular language, to which words are added at will. But Anishinaabe is different. Fluent speaker and spiritual teacher Stewart King reminds us that the language is sacred, a gift to the People to care for one another and for the Creation. It grows and adapts too, but through a careful protocol that respects the sanctity of the language.

He suggested that the proper Anishinaabe word for beings of the living Earth would be Bemaadiziiiaaki. I wanted to run through the woods calling it out, so grateful that this word exists. But I also recognized that this beautiful word would not easily find its way to take the place of “it.” We need a simple new English word to carry the meaning offered by the indigenous one. Inspired by the grammar of animacy and with full recognition of its Anishinaabe roots, might we hear the new pronoun at the end of Bemaadiziiiaaki, nestled in the part of the word that means land?

“Ki” to signify a being of the living Earth. Not “he” or “she,” but “ki.” So that when we speak of Sugar Maple, we say, “Oh that beautiful tree, ki is giving us sap again this spring.” And we’ll need a plural pronoun, too, for those Earth beings. Let’s make that new pronoun “kin.” So we can now refer to birds and trees not as things, but as our earthly relatives. On a crisp October morning we can look up at the geese and say, “Look, kin are flying south for the winter. Come back soon.”

Language can be a tool for cultural transformation. Make no mistake: “Ki” and “kin” are revolutionary pronouns. Words have power to shape our thoughts and our actions. On behalf of the living world, let us learn the grammar of animacy. We can keep “it” to speak of bulldozers and paperclips, but every time we say “ki,” let our words reaffirm our respect and kinship with the more-than-human world. Let us speak of the beings of Earth as the “kin” they are.

Robin is the founding director of the Center for native Peoples and the Environment at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Her book Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants (Milkweed Editions) was published in October 2014