From "Creation Care" to "Watershed Discipleship": Re-Placing Ecological Theology and Practice

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A few years ago, Paul Kingsnorth, a British environmental analyst, wrote this:

> Sitting on the desk in front of me are a set of graphs. The horizontal axis of each graph is identical: it represents time, from the years 1750 to 2000. The graphs show, variously, human population levels, CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere, exploitation of fisheries, destruction of tropical forests, paper consumption, number of motor vehicles, water use, the rate of species extinction and the totality of the gross domestic product of the human economy. What grips me about these graphs . . . is that though they all show very different things, they have an almost identical shape. A line begins on the left of the page, rising gradually as it moves to the right. Then, in the last inch or so — around the year 1950 — it suddenly veers steeply upwards. . . . The root cause of all these trends is the same: a rapacious human economy which is bringing the world very swiftly to the brink of chaos. We know this; some of us even attempt to stop it happening. Yet all of these trends continue to get rapidly worse, and there is no sign of that changing soon. . . .[1]

Kingsnorth crystallizes concisely the meaning of our historical moment and the essential rationale for my proposal in this paper.[2]

The deep and broad ecological crisis stalking human history for centuries has now arrived in the interlocking catastrophes of climate

[1] *The Guardian* August 18, 2009, www.monbiot.com/2009/08/18/should-we-seek-to-save-industrial-civilisation/.

[2] This is an edited, expanded version of a paper given at the Mennonite Scholars and Friends Forum at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature meetings on Nov. 23, 2013 in Baltimore, Maryland.

The Conrad Grebel Review 32, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 250-275.

destruction, habitat degradation, species extinction, and resource exhaustion (the so-called "peak everything"). Sober and scientific assessments of this crisis are converging in a consensus that the civilizational project is well down the road of an "endgame," whether we yet feel it existentially or not.[3] This dark ecological horizon has generated a spectrum of cultural moods, from pessimistic brooding or slow-burn despair to narcissistic resignation or determined technocratic optimism. In radical environmental circles, assessments of dwindling prospects often take on a decidedly apocalyptic tenor.

Thomas Merton's dictum, uttered under the shadow of an earlier, equally foreboding apocalyptic moment (the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis), offers an evangelical challenge to churches in this hour. "Christian hope," he wrote, "*begins* where every other hope stands frozen stiff before the face of the Unspeakable."[4] Whether Merton is right depends upon Christians choosing between discipleship and denial. Our faith and practice from now on will unfold either in light of or in spite of the ecological crisis. This paper explores the former trajectory, hoping to dissuade co-religionists from perpetuating the latter one.

I. Transition Faith

The most constructive public discourse for awakening citizens to "response-ability" in the face of these inconvenient truths is that of the growing "Transition" movement. Scarcely a decade old, it is a "grassroots network of local communities that are working to build ecological resilience in response to peak oil, climate destruction, and economic instability."[5] Timothy Gorringe and Rosie Beckham observe that this approach "tries to steer between the apocalyptic (social chaos, local warlordism) and the starry eyed

[3] Derrick Jensen, *Endgame*, volumes I and II (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006). See especially James Speth, *The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2008).

[4] Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1966), 4.

[5] At www.transitionnetwork.org. The contemporary manifesto is Rob Hoskins, *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008). Hoskins is a permaculture designer. A pioneering work was John William Bennett, *The Ecological Transition: Cultural Anthropology and Human Adaptation* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1976/2006). See also www.transitionus.org.

(hi tech, zero carbon)" versions of an energy-descending future. Churches, they argue, must "highlight how consonant the emphases of Transition are with the Christian narrative" while acknowledging that churches "can learn a great deal from engagement in this movement."[6] I agree. My proposal is predicated upon the conviction that every aspect of our faith and practice must be re-evaluated in terms of a Transition ethos. The church's urgent vocation must become, as Dorothy Day put it, to help "build a new world in the shell of the old."

A proliferation of books, classes, and conferences on eco-theology, popularized through "Creation Care" and "earth spirituality" movements, has gained wide traction among Christians.[7] Indeed, environmental stewardship is arguably the fastest growing area of public concern among North American churches, initially among mainstream Catholics and Protestants, and increasingly evangelicals and Anabaptists as well.[8] The Creation Care trend has been necessary to help recalibrate our theology; it is not yet sufficient in its responses to the creation crisis we now face everywhere.

On one hand, many environmental theologies are still overly abstract and insufficiently contextual.[9] On the other, too often the practical translations of Creation Care are merely cosmetic: congregations "go green" by recycling, light bulb changes, or community gardening, while avoiding

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[6] Timothy Gorringe and Rosie Beckham, *The Transition Movement for Churches: A Prophetic Imperative for Today* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2013). UK theologian Gorringe shares my interest in bioregionalism as a constructive paradigm.

[7] The literature is too voluminous to cite, but see the comprehensive bibliography online at The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale: http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/christianity/bibliography/.

[8] See, e.g., www.webofcreation.org; http://earthministry.org; www.creationcare.org; and www.blessedearth.org, to name just two. The inevitable counter-reaction is underway among conservatives: see e.g., http://standupforthetruth.com/hot-topics/environmental-movement/ and the duplicitous "greenwashing" of www.cornwallalliance.org.

[9] There are many exceptions. Larry Rasmussen, for example, is a pioneer in eco-theology and ethics, and his *Earth-honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012) heralds an important new turn. Eco-feminist theologies, such as those of Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, l992) and Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), argue for the centrality of the incarnational and the somatic.

political controversies such as Tar Sands extraction.[10] We must keep shaping approaches that are both radical (diagnosing the root pathologies within and around us and drawing deeply on our faith tradition) and practical.

The core paradigms and presumptions that gave rise to the "anthropocene" are precisely what must be overturned.[11] To characterize these in broad brush: every symptom of the modern ecological crisis can be traced to three interrelated philosophical errors in western Christendom that have underwritten histories of domination over the last 500 years:

> 1. A functional docetism has numbed Christians to the escalating horrors of both social and ecological violence. If spiritual (or doctrinal) matters trump terrestrial or somatic ones, Creation is pillaged accordingly, since it is assumed that salvation occurs outside it or beyond it.
>
> 2. The anthropological presumption that humans rule over Creation (shared with equal ferocity by religious traditionalists and secular modernists) rationalizes how modern technological development has exploited and re-engineered nature to benefit human settlement alone (increasingly only the elite).
>
> 3. A theology and/or politics of "divinely ordained" entitlement to land and resources—both in the colonizing and extractive senses—categorically rejects any suggestion that our production and consumption should be proscribed, and relieves us of responsibility for restoring degraded land and biotic (including human) communities.

What these three "articles of modern faith" have in common is a fantasy

[10] A case in point was a Feb. 25, 2014 day of briefings and "dialogue" for a hundred faith leaders from across the political and religious spectrum at the White House, co-hosted by the Environmental Protection Agency. It focused on pragmatic initiatives only; the controversial Keystone XL pipeline project was never broached (see a report at http://clbsj.org/?page_id=8).

[11] The term popularized by Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen has become shorthand for humans' over-determining impact on nature. For an overview and introductory videos, see www.anthropocene.info/en/home; for "maps" of this new reality, see http://thebreakthrough.org/index.php/programs/conservation-and-development/mapping-the-anthropocene.

of human autonomy that refuses the imperative of creatureliness—to live within the limits *of* the earth—despite the claim of the Genesis account that we were birthed *from* the earth.[12] Docetic dis-embodiment has engendered a culture of displaced and displacing mobility, severing us from rootedness in particular places while facilitating the conquest and colonization of homelands and habitats of others. Presumptive androcentrism has allowed the earth and her lifeforms to be turned into commodities to be extracted, owned, traded, consumed, and disposed of. Entitled ownership has justified bankrupting the earth's natural fertility and privatizing her commonwealth.

The task of eco-theology is to critique and combat these pathologies constructively and practically, not just deconstructively and ideologically. This requires approaches that are robustly incarnational rather than docetic, symbiotic rather than Promethean, and sustainable rather than selfish. If the root of our historic crisis lies in our alienation from the earth, then it is to the earth we must return, to paraphrase the warning in Genesis 3:19. But not in theory, or rhetorically, or as a romantic ideal. Rather, discipleship must be restored to the center of ecological theology (an evangelical opportunity for Anabaptists), and Transition practices must inhabit the center of this discipleship. Such re-centering begs the question: *Where*?

II. The Journey of Re-place-ment

A quarter-century ago Gary Snyder, celebrated poet of the modern ecology movement, contended that it is "not enough just to 'love nature' or to want to 'be in harmony with Gaia.' Our relation to the natural world takes place in a place, and it must be grounded in information and experience."[13] In a seminal essay, "Coming into the Watershed," he wrote:

> The usual focus of attention for most Americans is the human society itself with its problems and its successes, its icons and

[12] Lynn White's famous essay, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207, was largely correct in its indictment of Christendom's culpability in the ecological crisis, but largely wrong in tracing these roots to the Judeo-Christian scriptural tradition. See Ched Myers, "'To Serve and Preserve': The Genesis Commission to Earth Stewardship," *Sojourners,* March 2004, 28ff, and Willis Jenkins, "After Lynn White: Religious Ethics and Environmental Problems," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 2 (2009): 283-309.

[13] Gary Snyder, "The Place, the Region and the Commons," in *The Practice of the Wild* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 1990/2010), 42.

> symbols. . . . the land we all live on is simply taken for granted—and proper relation to it is not taken as part of "citizenship." But . . . people are beginning to wake up and notice that the United States is located on a landscape with a severe, spectacular, spacey, wildly demanding, and ecstatic narrative to be learned. Its natural communities are each unique, and each of us, whether we like it or not—in the city or countryside—live in one of them. . . . When enough people get that picture, our political life will begin to change, and it will be the beginning of the next phase of American life. [14]

Snyder's work echoes that of Kentucky farmer Wendell Berry, the foremost critic of placelessness in North America. Berry laments that the functionaries of globalized capitalism "have no local allegiances; they must not have a local point of view . . . in order to be able to desecrate, endanger, or destroy a *place*."[15] In a 1989 essay, "The Futility of Global Thinking," Berry articulates an essential point that underlies my argument in this paper. "No place on the earth can be completely healthy until all places are," he stipulated. However, "the question that must be addressed is not how to care for the planet, but how to care for each of the planet's millions of human and natural neighborhoods, each of its millions of small pieces and parcels of land, each one of which is in some precious way different from all the others."[16]

When I encountered these texts in the early 1990s, they "spoke to my condition," as Quakers say. The first Gulf War had enraged me as a citizen of empire; Los Angeles had just burned for the second time in my life because of endemic social disparity; and my father had died suddenly, my last link to

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[14] Gary Snyder, *Wild Earth* (Canton, NY: Cenozoic Society, 1992), 65ff; an edited version appears in Snyder, *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics and Watersheds: New and Selected Prose* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 1995), 219-35.

[15] "Higher Education and Home Defense," in *Home Economics* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987), 51.

[16] Wendell Berry, "Word and Flesh," in *What Are People For?* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 1990/2010), 200. Berry resonates with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assertion that "we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny" ("Letter from Birmingham City Jail," in *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.,* ed. James Washington [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986], 290).

five generations of family roots in California. Moreover, I was experiencing symptoms of what eco-psychologists call "solastalgia": being homesick in a homeplace that is being destroyed.[17] All my life I had seen the fragile chaparral and oak savannah landscapes of southern California relentlessly bulldozed and paved over by manic, unregulated "development." Suburban tracts and trophy homes, resorts and boutique wineries, golf courses and shopping malls, military complexes and industrial agriculture—all animated by transplanted opportunists pursuing fantasies or corporate exploiters seeking quick profit.

A fierce desire arose in me to defend what little was left of the native landscapes that had profoundly imprinted upon my soul. My organizing work with indigenous people throughout the Pacific Basin in the 1980s had taught me that traditional people struggle for beloved land, not just against their oppressors. In order not to be only another alienated First World activist, I determined to reconnect with the place I was living *on* but not *into* (in Snyder's sense). This journey of "re-place-ment" has been both outward (political, social, ecological) and inward (psychic, spiritual, theological).[18]

The crisis of the anthropocene presents myriad technological, economic, and political challenges that theology must take seriously.[19] The personal and political disciplines of re-place-ment are key for both Christian identity re-formation and the church's gospel witness to be truly contextual today. We have lost our way as creatures of God's biosphere—and only the map woven into Creation can lead us home.

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[17] See a concise definition at http://seedmagazine.com/content/article/what_is_solastalgia/. Also Glenn Albrecht, "Solastalgia, A New Concept in Human Health and Identity," *Philosophy Activism Nature* 3 (2005): 41-44.

[18] I exposit these dimensions in *Who Will Roll Away the Stone*? *Discipleship Queries for First World Christians* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994). The last decade has seen a growing interest in theology of place: see e.g., John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003); Craig Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); and Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001).

[19] Overviewed in Michael Northcutt, *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

III. Bioregionalism and Watershed Mapping

For more than forty years, an old/new paradigm broadly termed "bioregionalism" has re-emerged in North America and beyond. It has spiritual and intellectual roots first in the example of traditional indigenous cultures, and second in Henry David Thoreau's mid-19th century experiments at Walden and Lewis Mumford's early 20th-century critique of "super-congestion" in industrial society and proposal of "ecoregionalism" as an alternative.[20] One of the movement's pioneers and chroniclers summarizes the trend: "Bioregionalism is a body of thought and related practice that has evolved in response to the challenge of reconnecting socially-just human cultures in a sustainable manner to the region-scale ecosystems in which they are irrevocably embedded. Over nearly twenty-five years this ambitious project of 're-inhabitation' has carefully evolved far outside of the usual political or intellectual epicenters."[21] Kirkpatrick Sale's 1985 primer provides a helpful definition of "bioregionalism":

> *Bio* is from the Greek word for forms of life . . . and *region* is from the Latin *regere*, territory to be ruled. . . . They convey together a life-territory, a place defined by its life forms, its topography and its biota, rather than by human dictates; a region governed by nature, not legislature. And if the concept initially strikes us as strange, that may perhaps only be a measure of how distant we have become from the wisdom it conveys.[22]

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[20] Lewis Mumford, "A Rehearsal to Bioregionalism," in Michael Vincent McGinnis, ed., *Bioregionalism* (London: Routledge, 1999), 3.

[21] Doug Aberly, "Interpreting Bioregionalism: A story from many voices," in *ibid.*, 14f. See Aberly, *Boundaries of Home: Mapping for Local Empowerment* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1993), and *Futures by Design: The Practice of Ecological Planning* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1994). For an early influential manifesto, see Jim Dodge, "Living by Life: Some Bioregional Thought and Practice," *Co-evolution Quarterly* 32 (1981): 6-12. Other notable early works: Jim Cheney, "Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics as Bioregional Narrative," *Environmental Ethics* 11, no. 2 (1989): 117-34; Van Andrus et al., *Home! A Bioregional Reader* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990); and Robert Thayer, ed., *Lifeplace: Bioregional Thought and Practice* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003), and others mentioned below. For current organizing see the websites of groups in Canada (www.ibspei.ca/index.htm), the US (http://wp.bioregionalcongress.net/), and the UK (www.bioregional.com/). Thayer provides a comprehensive bibliography of bioregionalist writing prior to 1999 at http://bioregion.ucdavis.edu/who/biblio.html.

[22] Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* (San Francisco: Sierra Club

More recently, many bioregionalists have emphasized an even more specific locus for re-inhabitory literacy and engagement, focusing on what is most basic to life: water.[23] John Wesley Powell, the first non-native person to raft successfully down the Colorado River in the 1860s, gave the first modern definition of a watershed: "It is that area of land, a bounded hydrologic system, within which all living things are inextricably linked by their common water course and where, as humans settled, simple logic demanded that they become part of the community."[24] Wherever we reside—city, suburb, rural area—our lives are deeply intertwined within such a "bounded hydrologic system." Precipitation hits the ridges and flows into our watershed or a neighboring one, drained by a watercourse and its tributaries (even if buried under concrete). The area covered in the water's journey from its origination in the hydrological cycle to its end point in a pond, lake, or ocean is the watershed. Every watershed comprises a unique mix of habitats that influence each other, including forests, wetlands, fields and meadows, rivers and lakes, farms, and towns. All life is watershed-placed without exception, and ignorance of this fact is consequential.

The 2,110 watersheds in the continental US come in all sizes. The Mississippi Basin is the third largest watershed in the world, draining 41 percent of the lower 48 states into the Gulf of Mexico. The Ventura River watershed, where I live, is a scant 227 square miles. Brock Dolman, a permaculturist and founder of the Occidental Art and Ecology Center in Northern California, argues that watersheds "underlie all human endeavors and form the foundation for all future aspirations and survival." He invokes the metaphor of a cradle, which he calls a "Basin of Relations," in which every living organism is interconnected and dependent on the health of the whole. This form of "social, local, intentional community with other life forms and inanimate processes, like the fire cycle and the hydrological cycle" represents "the geographic scale of applied sustainability, which must be regenerative,

Books, 1985), 43.

[23] For some theological foundations, see Ched Myers, "Everything Will Live Where the River Goes: A Bible Study on Water, God, and Redemption," *Sojourners*, April 2012. http://sojo.net/magazine/2012/04. See also Christiana Peppar, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics and the Global Water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014).

[24] John Wesley Powell, *The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*, 1875; online at https://archive.org/details/explorationofcol1961powe.

because we desperately are in need of making up for lost time."[25]

Watershed mapping helps promote this alternative way of viewing reality. It is a practical tool for advancing literacy in the actual landscapes that sustain us, requiring us to learn about geological features, soil types, climate zones, and flora and fauna as well as about built environments.[26] At the same time it helps us re-imagine the world. In western culture, social (and ecological) worldviews have been profoundly shaped by two-dimensional political maps. But these are social re-productions that enshrine problematic historical legacies of colonization and exploitation while rendering nature secondary or invisible altogether.

The graphic on the next page is a recent watershed map of the United States imagined by John Lavey.[27] How might political culture change if the basic unit of governance was "nature rather than legislature"?[28]

The second graphic is a map of the boundaries of Ventura and Los Angeles Counties, overlaid onto those of the various watersheds of our region (the Ventura River Watershed where I live is highlighted).[29] The disconnect

[25] "Know Your Lifeboat: An Interview With Permaculturist Brock Dolman," November 10, 2011, at http://ecohearth.com/eco-zine/eco-heroes/1088-know-your-lifeboat-an-interview-with-permaculturist-brock-dolman.html. See also Dolman, *Basins of Relations: A Citizen's Guide to Protecting and Restoring Our Watershed* (Occidental, CA: Water Institute, 2008); also www.oaecwater.org.

[26] On this see http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/activity/mapping-watersheds/?ar_a=1; and www.nativemaps.org.

[27] Map by John Lavey can be viewed at http://communitybuilders.net/the-united-watershed-states-of-america/ and at www.flickr.com/photos/108072018@N03/10929250216. Printed here by permission of John Lavey (jlavey@sonoraninstitute.org).

[28] In 1879 John Wesley Powell proposed that as new states were brought into the union they be formed around watersheds rather than arbitrary political boundaries. He believed, presciently, that because of an arid climate, state organization decided by any other factor would lead to water conflict. Powerful forces, however, most prominently the rail companies, were pressing that borders be aligned to facilitate commercial agriculture. The West, Powell argued, was too dry and its soils too poor to support agriculture at a scale common in the East; so he produced a map depicting what "watershed states" might look like. The rail lobby prevailed in Congress, with profound and continuing consequences. For that map and background see Charles Hutchinson, "John Wesley Powell and the New West," www.cosmosclub.org/web/journals/2000/hutchinson.html. For a recent exploration of Powell's legacy, see Jack and Celestia Loeffler, eds., *Thinking Like a Watershed: Voices from the West* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2012).

[29] This map is found at www.waterboards.ca.gov/losangeles/water_issues/programs/regional_

The United [Watershed] States of America

What if American States Were Defined by Watershed Boundary?

Source: John Lavey. See note 27.

Watershed and Boundaries: Los Angeles and Ventura Counties

Source: State of California. See note 29.

is apparent: political boundaries are often straight (no continental US state is without one), while watershed boundaries never are. Such straight lines are the first order of abstraction, alienating us from the topographical and hydrological realities sustaining us. Happily, after years of lobbying, local activists recently persuaded the Ventura Countywide Stormwater Program to install road signs around our valley reading "Entering the Ventura River Watershed." Getting a public agency to name the watershed concept in public space is a small but significant sign of the times. If maps are a battleground for shaping consciousness, so too is signage directing us around the landscape!

IV. Watershed Consciousness as Socio-Political Paradigm

A watershed focus does not imply escaping from the wider issues of society or politics, as has too often been true of middle-class conservationist agendas.

program/Water_Quality_and_Watersheds/ventura_river_watershed/summary.shtml. Printed here by permission of the Water Resources Control Board of the State of California.

"Watershed consciousness and bioregionalism is not just environmentalism . . . but a move toward resolving both nature and society with the practice of a profound citizenship in both the natural and the social worlds."[30]

Coming to bioregionalism steeped in peace and justice activism and education, I am deeply committed to an integral approach. After all, virtually every watershed on the planet now bears the marks of modern human habitation and degradation. Social disparity, exclusion, and violence—both historic and contemporary—can and should be mapped and engaged at the watershed level. However, the watershed paradigm subverts dominant maps of reality, animating our political and social imaginations regarding what is possible—and imperative. A few notes must suffice here to sketch out this terrain.

Economics By any measure of social justice or ecological sustainability, globalized capitalism is not working. A watershed focus compels us to account for what Wendell Berry calls the "Great Economy" of nature.[31] Molly Scott Cato's study signals that the discipline of bioregional economics has arrived, and economists are beginning to study particular watersheds.[32] This new way of thinking is best popularized by the local food movement, which asks what can be harvested, produced, and consumed sustainably in a given bioregion. This logic should be extended to every aspect of economic life, from planning to resource extraction to waste management. We must move toward regenerative perspectives in planning and develop indigenous (or naturalized) economic assets sustainably, while weaning ourselves off the exotic and the outsourced, including labor and capital.[33]

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[30] Snyder, *A Place in Space,* 235.

[31] Wendell Berry, *Home Economics* (San Francisco: Northpoint Press, 1987).

[32] Scott Cato, *The Bioregional Economy: Land, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness* (London: Routledge, 2013). See economic metrics applied to watersheds in Rhode Island (www.watershedcounts.org/economic.html) and Washington: www.eartheconomics.org/FileLibrary/file/Reports/Puget%20Sound%20and%20Watersheds/Puyallup/Puyallup_Watershed_Report_Online_Version.pdf. Ecological economist Paul Hawken suggests that an economy functions *like* a watershed: http://urbanhabitat.org/node/511. An early expression of bioregional economics (1999) is Bernard Lietaer and Art Warmoth, "Designing Bioregional Economies in Response to Globalization": http://ausar.com/Articles-EEconomy/Designing%20Bioregional%20Economies.pdf). See also http://www.reliableprosperity.net/bioregional_economies.html.

[33] See, e.g., www.zerowaste.org/; www.financialpermaculture.org/. Mark Boyle promotes "the

Politics Montana politician Daniel Kemmis, an important progenitor of contemporary bioregionalism, argues that "re-inhabitory politics" arises from "the efforts of unlike people to live well in specific places."[34] Our political culture would be healthier if it mirrored the "hetarchy" of nature, privileging local self-determination and bioregional confederation over the centralized state, an urge toward self-determination that has characterized most of human history.[35] Kirkpatrick Sale argues that tendencies toward atomization would be constrained by the fact that watershed citizens "share the same configurations of life . . . social and economic constraints . . . environmental problems and opportunities, and so there is every reason to expect contact and cooperation among them."

Provincialism is constrained by the fact that the ecological and social health of each watershed is connected with every other. Snyder calls for "watershed councils" to be the locus of bioregional governance. That many such bodies have been formed across North America—some advisory, some adjudicatory—suggests that new practices of citizenship are being built in the shell of unsustainable political systems.[36] From a Transition perspective, personal changes are more meaningful, and collective change more measurable, at a watershed scale.

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convergence of permaculture principles with gift economics": www.permaculture.co.uk/articles/wild-economics-interview-mark-boyle).

[34] Daniel Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 82. See also his *This Sovereign Land: A New Vision for Governing the West* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2001).

[35] Sale, *Dwellers in the Land,* 94ff. See also Mike Carr, *Bioregionalism and Civil Society: Democratic Challenges to Corporate Globalism* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 2004); Robyn Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an Ecocentric Approach* (New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1992; and Mark Whitaker, *Toward a Bioregional State: A Series of Letters About Political Theory and Formal Institutional Design in the Era of Sustainability* (E-book, iUniverse, Inc., 2005).

[36] Snyder, *A Place in Space,* 229. The Ventura River Watershed Council exemplifies how grassroots, governmental, and business interests can cooperate in regional mapping, planning, management, and restoration (http://venturawatershed.org/). A pioneering non-profit organization in Arizona is Watershed Management Group (http://watershedmg.org/). See also Charles Foster, *Experiments in Bioregionalism: The New England River Basins Story* (Hanover, NH: Univ. Press of New England, 1984); John Woolley et al., "The California Watershed Movement: Science and the Politics of Place," *Natural Resources Journal* 42 (2002): 133ff.

Social and Environmental Justice Central to a watershed ethos should be a commitment to restorative justice for all those displaced in the past and marginalized in the present. The land itself is an historic subject whose story must be learned.[37] The current health of the place must be assessed from the perspective of both land and people who have experienced degradation: poisoned agricultural fields and farmworkers; paved over strip malls and low-wage workers; threatened riparian habitat and homeless people.[38] In particular, we must learn the legacy of indigenous peoples—whether disappeared, displaced, or "inconveniently" present.[39] Though many traditional lifeways were casualties of conquest and colonization, our collective survival depends upon rediscovering how native people lived sustainably long before immigrants arrived. Indeed, the full restoration of *any* watershed in North America must include the demanding process of "truth and reconciliation" (about which Canada's experiment concerning the Indian residential schools legacy has much to teach us).[40] The same restorative justice commitments should also extend to non-human inhabitants of the watershed. [41]

Katherine McCabe summarizes these concerns under the rubric of "Just Sustainability," which she describes as "an approach that recognizes the inseparable nature of social and environmental justice and sustainability,

[37] A magnificent example of this approach is Will Campbell's *Providence* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2002), narrating Southern history from the perspective of a one square-mile plot of land in Mississippi. See also William Lang, "Bioregionalism and the History of Place," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 103, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 414-19.

[38] David Pepper offers a Marxist analysis of "green politics" in *Eco-Socialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[39] See Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2013).

[40] See www.trc.ca. It is also important to build relations with other people of the land near and far, such as Palestinian olive farmers, Basque sheep herders, or immigrant Mexican *vaqueros*. They too are living repositories of the wisdom and practical competencies arising from a placed way of life, and their survival testifies to a remarkable ability to resist assimilation and retain traditional skills.

[41] The field of ecological restorative justice is developing. See, e.g., Tama Weisman, "Restorative Environmental Justice as a Way of Life: Learning from Ubuntu," *Dialogue and Universalism* 3, no. 1 (2012): 92-109; Brian Preston, "The Use of Restorative Justice for Environmental Crime," 35 *Criminal Law Journal* 136 (2011); and www.restorativejustice.org/press-room/07kindscrimes/ecological-crimes.

and pushes for organizations and governmental institutions to become more aware of the relationships that exist between inequality, injustice and environmentally unsustainable practices."[42] Such integration is intrinsic to a watershed paradigm.

V. Watershed Discipleship

Bioregional thought and practice have been mostly ignored by Christian theology and ethics until recently.[43] Nevertheless, a watershed paradigm not only holds a key to our survival as a species but can also inspire the next great renewal of a church determined to live in light of, not in spite of, the looming ecological endgame. It roots Creation Care in place, offering a radical yet practical approach to Transition faith.

What would it mean for Christians broadly and Anabaptists in particular to re-center our citizen-identity in the topography of Creation, rather than in the political geography of dominant cultural ideation, and to ground our discipleship practices in the watershed where we reside? An alliance of faith-rooted organizers and educators around North America is currently exploring "watershed discipleship" as a framing idea, which seems to be resonating, particularly in Mennonite circles.[44] The phrase is an intentional triple entendre:

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[42] Katherine McCabe, "The Environment on Our Doorsteps: Community Restorative Justice and the Roots of Sustainability" (Master of Science thesis, Univ. of Michigan, 2009), http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/64292.

[43] Exceptions in the New Cosmology movement include Thomas Berry, e.g., "The Hudson River Valley: A Bioregional Story," in *At Home on the Earth: Becoming Native to Our Place* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1999), 103-10. See also Anne Marie Dalton, *A Theology for the Earth: The Contributions of Thomas Berry and Bernard Lonergan* (Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa Press, 1999), 98ff, and Diarmu O'Murchu, *Ancestral Grace: Meeting God in Our Human Story* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008). Non-professional theologians Wendell Berry, Wes Jackson, and the late Jim Corbett in *Goatwalking: A Guide to Wildland Living, A Quest for the Peaceable Kingdom* (New York: Viking, 1991) and *A Sanctuary for All Life* (Engelwood, CO: Howling Dog Press, 2005) operate within the spirit of bioregionalism, though not using its discourse. Twenty years ago my conclusions in *Who Will Roll Away the Stone*?, proposing a reconstructive theology of re-place-ment and politics of bioregionalism did not find much of an audience among churches, but these ideas seem to be resonating now.

[44] We convened gatherings in California and Maryland in 2013 to inaugurate the Alliance; see http://watersheddiscipleship.org.

> 1. It recognizes that we are in a watershed historical moment of crisis, which demands that environmental and social justice and sustainability be integral to everything we do as Christians and as citizen inhabitants of specific places.
>
> 2. It acknowledges the inescapably bioregional locus of an incarnational following of Jesus: our discipleship and the life of the local church inescapably take place in a watershed context.
>
> 3. It also implies that we need to be disciples *of* our watersheds. In the New Testament, discipleship is a journey of learning from, following, and coming to trust the "rabbi"—which in this case is the "Book of Creation."[45]

The challenge here, to paraphrase an argument made in 1968 by Senegalese environmentalist Baba Dioum, is that we won't save places we don't love; we can't love places we don't know; and we don't know places we haven't learned. From the beginning of human history, nothing was more crucial to the survival and flourishing of traditional societies than a symbiotic, relational ethos of watershed literacy and loyalty. It remains necessary today, but we have a long way to go to reconstruct the intimacy required to know, love, and save our places.

Obviously, understanding Christian discipleship in terms of a commitment to heal the world by restoring the social and ecological health of our respective watersheds is still marginal in churches. Yet ecclesial communities of place can make an enormous contribution to the wider struggle to reverse the ecological catastrophe—and in the process recover the soul of their faith tradition. Christians are deeply culpable in the present crisis but also have ancient resources for the deep shifts needed.

The nascent Watershed Discipleship Alliance seeks to amplify the perspectives outlined in this paper through education, advocacy, and training. We focus on three key aspects of a "Watershed Ecclesiology":

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[45] See Todd Wynward's post at http://watersheddiscipleship.org/blog/region-rabbi, Nov. 12, 2013. St. Bonaventure was one of many church Fathers who spoke of Creation as "scripture": "Throughout the entire creation, the wisdom of God shines forth…. Truly, whoever reads this book will find life and will draw salvation from the Lord" (cited at www.bookofnature.org/library/ngb.html).

Theology and Scripture, Liturgy and Spirituality, and Church Practices.

Theology and Scripture

Watershed discipleship draws deeply on the biblical tradition to address all three key dysfunctional elements of industrial civilization and religion mentioned above.

Only a grounded incarnational faith can battle the placeless theological docetism of modernity with its abstract rationalism and idealist ethics. A watershed hermeneutic remembers that the core narrative of the Hebrew Bible concerns a people covenanting with God and with specific land as caretakers of the divine gift. It recovers a terrestrial Jesus who, in the tradition of the wilderness prophets, is intimate with his bioregion (baptized in a river, praying on mountains, traversing the sea, pointing to wildflowers as object lessons), consistently illustrating the "Reign of God" by referencing plants and animals, human bodies, and food.[46] It shares the vision of an eschatological metropolis transfigured into a garden, the world re-hydrated by the healing "River of Life."[47] From Noah to the New Jerusalem, the biblical tradition understands that the earth and her inhabitants will be redeemed in their materiality.

Only relationship with proximate biotic communities can wean us off our presumptive superiority. Watershed discipleship asserts the priority of Creation over all ideological or hegemonic claims, and re-centers anthropology in placed creatureliness, defined by symbiosis and servanthood, not by objectification and domination. It recognizes that Creation is "groaning in travail," waiting for us to embrace the work of liberation and healing (Rom. 8:19-23).[48] This means that our primary vocation is not to re-engineer Creation to human benefit, an impulse biblically identified with the Fall, but to rediscover communion with, and our proper place in, the

[46] For example, in Matthew's gospel alone Jesus invokes seeds (13:24, 31), fields (13:44, 20:1), fish (13:47), healed bodies (9:35), children (18:3), yeast (13:33), pearls (13:45), and wine (26:29) as expressions of God's Reign. For an exploration of this matter, see Ched Myers, "Pay Attention to the Birds: A Bible Study on Luke 12," *Sojourners* 38, no. 11, December 2009, 29ff.

[47] See Myers, "Everything Will Live Where the River Goes," n23 above.

[48] The verbs in verses 22 (*sustenazō*, only here in the NT) and 23 (*stenazō*) may allude to the "groan" of the Israelites under slavery (LXX *stenagmos*, Ex 2:24, 6:5, as in Rom 8:26).

community of earth.[49] We must relearn the lesson of the "unhewn stone" (Ex. 20:25), which stipulates the intrinsic value of the earth while problematizing the work of our hands, especially when technologically mediated, as always potentially idolatrous (see, e.g., Isa. 44:9-20).

Only the long-term project of living sustainability some*where* can wean us off the addictive-compulsive consumption and quest for autonomous infinitude. Watershed discipleship embraces the "Sabbath Economics" tradition of scripture, with its cosmology of gift, reciprocity, equity, and self-limitation.[50] This tradition challenges both exploitive materialism that commodifies and pillages the earth and alienated spiritualism that refuses responsibility for such behaviors. And it resists the way industrial civilization keeps us mobile (following economic booms and busts until we are placeless), enjoining instead practices of re-inhabitation and solidarity with degraded places and people.

Ecological readings of scripture have increased over the past two decades, from the Earth Bible Project to the Seasons of Creation Lectionary.[51] Yet much more is to be done.[52] The Bible is an ally, not an adversary, of watershed discipleship; indeed, the prophetic traditions of both testaments may alone be capable of rousing us from an ecocidal slumber to a regenerative imagination.

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[49] See Ched Myers, "From Garden to Tower (Genesis 1-11): Re-Visioning Our Origins," in ed. Steve Heinrichs, *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice and Life Together* (Waterloo, ON; Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2013), 109-21.

[50] See Ched Myers, *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics* (Washington, DC: Tell the Word, 2001).

[51] See www.flinders.edu.au/ehl/theology/ctsc/projects/earthbible/ and publications listed there by Norman Habel and others; and http://seasonofcreation.com/ and www.bibleandecology.org/.

[52] For example, see my exploration of the prophetic protest of deforestation, "'The Cedar has Fallen!' The Prophetic Word vs. Imperial Clear-cutting," *Earth and Word: Classic Sermons on Saving the Planet,* ed. David Rhoads (London: Continuum, 2007), 211-23, and of Jesus' so-called cursing of the fig tree, "Jesus Talks to Plants: Agrarian Wisdom and Earth Symbolism," *A Faith Encompassing All Creation: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for the Environment,* eds. Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014). For a tentative look at principles and practices for reading the Bible with a "permacultural sensibility" (or "permeneutics"), see www.chedmyers.org/blog/2014/05/09/permeneutics.

VI. The Parish Re-placed

Liturgy and Spirituality

The church's symbolic life stands to be renewed richly by watershed engagement and literacy. "The task of re-placed theology is to reclaim symbols of redemption which are indigenous to the bioregion in which the church dwells, to remember the stories of the peoples of the place, and to sing anew the old songs of the land. These traditions can be woven together with the symbols, stories and songs of biblical radicalism. This will necessarily be a local, contextual and often deeply personal project." [53]

One of the exercises my organization does with groups has them recontextualize Mark's prologue (Mark 1:1-20) in their own bioregions. Which places in their watershed might be analogous to Mark's wilderness or the Jordan River? What might be the dynamics of power and social crisis analogous to Mark's geopolitical and historic specificity, in which people suffering foreign domination were drawn from urban centers out to the margins to encounter a wilderness prophet? Who in their local history might be analogous to John (a notorious prophet arrested by the authorities) or to the marginalized peasant fishermen Jesus called to join his movement? This exercise requires literacy not only in the gospel narrative, its dynamics and literary antecedents, but also in our own bioregions, including topography, spiritual and storied traditions, political history, and social matrices. Participants report that both ancient text and present context come alive through such analogical imagination.

Sacraments are also crucial points of connection. What local waters might be used for baptism? Better to move such rituals outside to a creek, lake, or beach; but we can also bring *those* waters into the sanctuary. The Abundant Table Farm Project, a local partner, is developing a campaign challenging Episcopalians to "localize the liturgy": to know where the bread and wine, candles, and tapestries come from, who made them and under what conditions.[54] Apprehending the bioregional materiality of the sacraments stimulates conversation about local economy and ecology, and this careful attention in turn deepens an appreciation for the symbols.

Individual or church retreats can become times to learn watershed

[53] Myers, *Who Will Roll Away the Stone?*, 369.

[54] See http://theabundanttable.org/.

literacy; to encourage personal healing around displacement and solastalgia; to pray outdoors, learning to be still and observe; to explore the many Christian traditions of nature mysticism; or to engage in recovery work around behaviors feeding the ecological crisis, such as compulsive consumption or work addiction.

Church Practices

Developing a "Watershed Ecclesiology" involves consciously rethinking our collective habits, large and small. The tradition of having fresh flowers in the sanctuary, for example, becomes an opportunity to learn and deploy native plants, using them as conversation pieces about the bioregion. Congregational artists can imagine ways to bring watershed iconography into the worship space, and avid hikers can mobilize to get church members out into the watershed. Potluck meals become times to discuss household Sabbath Economics covenanting around difficult issues like money and ecological footprints, made more possible because food is friendly.[55] The midweek Bible study or Sunday adult education hour might explore the rich, growing literature on ecotheology.[56]

Mission trips can investigate and respond to local social disparities, especially regarding "environmental racism" and the unequal impacts of climate change on the poor.[57] The young adult group can pack into the

[55] See Matthew Colwell, *Sabbath Economics: Household Practices* (Washington, DC: Tell the Word, 2008). While recognizing the need for systemic change and policy advocacy, Sabbath Economics and Watershed Discipleship work at the concrete intersections between "big" issues (e.g., economic justice, climate change) and people's daily lives, thus combatting paralysis or exoneration. Empowered, engaged citizens are more likely to take collective political action.

[56] We have benefited from the work of biblical scholars Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009) and Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), as well as from recent popular theologies such as Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), Fred Bahnson, *Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), and Ragan Sutterfield, *Cultivating Reality: How the Soil Might Save Us* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013).

[57] For exemplary research and analysis on these issues in California, see the USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (http://dornsife.usc.edu/pere/ej/).

backcountry to pick up micro-trash; visit a similarly engaged church in another watershed to compare notes and cross-train; seek to encounter the realities of environmental refugees (who are now everywhere); or venture a road trip to protest Keystone XL or a local fracking site. If churches offered to help the rising generation prepare for a difficult future marked by resource wars and increasing calls for natural and social disaster relief, perhaps youth would inhabit our congregations more.

Foremost is the task of re-inhabiting the church's own location. The older notion of parish-as-*placed*-community is still alive, even if atrophied by market-driven church shopping and commuter mobility. Older congregations often retain a robust sense of local or regional identity, while some are named after an ecological feature of the watershed. A notable example of a "bioregional remodel" is Southside Presbyterian Church in South Tucson, ground zero during the Sanctuary movement of the 1980s and still active in immigrant rights organizing. Members reconfigured their sanctuary in the round, slightly recessed below floor level to resemble a *kiva* (ceremonial space of the nearby Pueblo Indians), and incorporated the Catholic tradition of saints with various *nichos* around the perimeter. Native landscaping now surrounds the building, including a living ocotillo cactus fence.[58] In architecture and design, the medium is the message—and for churches, part of the witness.

Most existing congregational brick and mortar must be audited and retrofitted for greater environmental resiliency, from water catchment to energy use. But this is only the first step. Churches represent some of the last local community spaces left in capitalist society. So, why can't the church kitchen become a venue through the week for re-skilling around cooking with local foods as well as fermenting, canning, and preserving—in which under-deployed congregational elders teach young adults the older arts of home economics? The fellowship hall can host meetings to improve the ecological and social health of the watershed, while significant parts of the lawn or parking lot can (and should) be repurposed for community vegetable gardening, growing native herbs for medicinal use, natural building, and permaculture classes. Reimagining how we use church buildings and

[58] See www.southsidepresbyterian.org; for their work with immigrants, see www.tucsonsamaritans.org.

grounds could signal a new era of "demonstration project evangelism" across the landscape. Such projects can inspire church members, the neighborhood, and even local authorities to replicate best practices.

It may require as many generations to reclaim our land and sense of place in North America as it did to destroy them. But we have no alternative, and the process of "energy descent and identity reclamation" must proceed with urgency. In many ways churches are ideally situated to become local centers for learning to love our places enough to defend and restore them. Yet we must first "re-inhabit" these places *as church*, allowing the natural landscapes to shape our symbolic life, social engagements, and material habits. The ecclesial practices suggested above do not require parishioners to embrace a dire analysis of the ecological crisis; they are good liturgical, stewardship, mission, and evangelism practices that make pragmatic sense on their own. Yet pursuing them can and should open up a deeper conversation and consciousness—because we *are* at a critical crossroad. Christians must move rapidly from environmental denial to watershed discipleship.

VII. Anabaptist Resonances

I conclude with five ways in which watershed discipleship is congruent with, even indigenous to, an Anabaptist vision of faith and practice.

First, a watershed vision of church centers on convictions that must translate into practices. Abstract doctrines and theological idealism are responsible for the church's complicity with our historic crisis. Anabaptism faith is about discipleship, not just belief, and our evangelical task is to help this become normative for all Christians in an age of ecocide.

Second, our tradition takes baptism for discipleship as central. The 16th-century radical reformers publicly expressed their conviction in the liturgical (and political) act of re-baptism. This water ritual was about re-identification with the Way of Jesus, which they correctly understood to mean, among other things, a refusal to fight or to rule. This rejection of civil religion earned them the ire of the Christian state, and they were often drowned in rivers in order to ridicule and terrorize their re-baptizing movement. Anabaptists thus understood all too well that "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death" (Rom. 6:3). But baptism is also about life, drawing on the deepest roots of the gospel story, in

which Jesus' Way was inaugurated by John the Baptist in the wild, cleansing, renewing waters of the Jordan River. Jesus' immersion into his sacred watershed, into the heart of a place and people crying out for liberation, signaled his recommitment to the Creator, the Creation, and the Covenant.

Tellingly, Gary Snyder resorts to the venerable language of baptism to describe the conversion required to re-inhabit our bioregions today: "For the non-Native American to become at home on this continent, he or she must be born again in this hemisphere."[59] Might this suggest that the Anabaptist tradition of re-baptism could be seen as a liturgical "sign" of re-placing ourselves not only into the Way of Jesus but, like Jesus, also into our watersheds? [60] The ancient baptismal litany calls on us to "renounce Satan and all his works, and sin, so as to live in the freedom of the children of God"; might this be understood afresh in terms of our struggle with the personal and political pathologies and addictions that have brought us to the historic ecological crisis?

Third, watershed discipleship seeks to re-root our identity and work as a Peace Church in specific "basins of relations." Mennonites must figure out the new shape of conscientious objection, nonviolent resistance, and restorative justice in the context of industrial culture's all-out war on the

[59] Snyder, "The Place, the Region and the Commons," 43. This "full immersion" metaphor resonates provocatively with the gospel baptism account.

[60] In Mark's baptism narrative (Mark 1:9-12) we find similar prepositional awkwardness to Snyder's call to "come *into* the watershed." All those coming out to the wilderness prophet John are baptized *in* the Jordan (Greek *en*). Jesus, however, is baptized *into* the river (Greek *eis ton Iordanēn*), a difference with great theological and social significance: see Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988/2008), 129. Moreover, a wild bird then descends *onto* (or into?) Jesus (*eis auton*), and after this epiphany Jesus is driven by the Spirit deeper *into* the wilderness (*eis tēn eremon)* on a kind of "vision quest" to discover the roots of the historic crisis of his people: see Ched Myers, "The Wilderness Temptations and the American Journey," in *Richard Rohr: Illuminations of His Life and Work*, ed. A. Ebert and P. Brockman (New York: Crossroads, 1993), 143-57). While theologians usually understand Jesus' baptism as empowerment "from above," we could argue he was being en-spirited from "below" through a deep immersion *into* his beloved homeland, grounding him in the storied land of his ancestors, through which the Creator still speaks. Being "born again" *into* the sacred, wild spaces of a land groaning under Roman imperialism thus prepared him for his campaign to liberate and heal his people and place (hence the allusion in Mark 1:10 to Isaiah 64:1f).

biosphere from mountain-top removal to deep-sea drilling.[61] Anabaptist peacemaking has much to learn from biotic communities about diversity, interdependence, and long-suffering resilience; indeed, solidarity with Creation-as-victim will teach much about a discipleship of the Cross.

Fourth, no Christian tradition of European origin has more to offer the reconstruction of agrarian theology and practices today. Historically, Anabaptists often found refuge from persecution by retreating to marginal habitats on society's fringes. When allowed to settle, they tended to steward land well and model sustainable home economics on limited resources. Watershed disciples would do well to draw deeply on the long tradition of "more with less" experiments in simplicity, mutual aid, and sustainable farming for which many Amish and Mennonites are still known.

Finally, and key to all the above, watershed discipleship embraces the Anabaptist conviction that because God cannot be identified with the State, citizenship consequently can be understood as loyalty to God's good Creation, which trumps *all* human ideological and hegemonic claims. Does this not represent the final deconstruction of Constantinianism? The essentially dis-established, anarchic character of Anabaptist self-organization coheres well with contemporary visions of bioregional self-determination and confederation (and with traditional indigenous tribal polities). Our traditions of heterogeneous, non-hierarchical communal consultation and discernment will be helpful for building a culture of consensual decision making in watershed councils.

To be sure, advocating for and experimenting with such models seems unrealistic amidst the super-concentrations of political and economic power today. But remember that 16th-century Anabaptists were alone and isolated in their insistence on separating church from state, yet that "heresy" eventually became conventional wisdom. Like Anabaptists, watershed visionaries will have to find the spiritual resources, fierce patience, and communal stamina for the long-term prospect of living and working against mainstream culture, while stubbornly incubating radical alternatives that may germinate only in the very long term.

In sum, the Anabaptist movement historically survived mainly by

[61] A good example of such experimentation is Christian Peacemaker Teams' Aboriginal Justice work in Canada (see www.cpt.org/work/aboriginal_justice).

sustaining small relational communities that practiced mutual aid in specific bioregional contexts and were more attentive to the land than to the dictates of the State and the surrounding economic culture. Those traditional patterns represent substantive parallels to the reconstructive work of watershed discipleship today. I hope that Mennonite (and environmentalist) colleagues will deem them worth exploring seriously.[62]

In order to forge a different future that is sustainable, resilient, and just, we must be born again into watershed discipleship. We are, says Brock Dolman, "perched on the tipping point of a watershed moment. . . . Now is the time to bring our communities together to set in motion plans and processes that ensure our watersheds will remain healthy in perpetuity. Your home basin of relations is your lifeboat."[63] Dolman's lifeboat metaphor recalls the story of Noah's ark. But it also conjures up that moment where Jesus has to *force* his disciples to get into their boat to cross to the "other side"—a journey they were reluctant to embrace, having nearly drowned on the first voyage (Mark 6:45). I pray that the Spirit which hovers still over Creation will summon Christians—especially those of Anabaptist orientation—to embark on the journey of solidarity with and in our watershed arks. May we as disciples in this difficult hour follow Father Noah and Brother Jesus into the coming storm!

Ched Myers is an activist theologian, biblical scholar, educator, author, organizer and advocate for peace and justice work and radical discipleship. He lives and works in southern California. For a list of his publications and other information, visit www.ChedMyers.org.

[62] Our organization is pleased with a growing partnership with Mennonite Church USA's Creation Care Network (http://www.mennocreationcare.org/) around Watershed Discipleship organizing. Albuquerque Mennonite Church proclaimed itself a "watershed community" in April, 2014 (http://www.abqmennonite.org/).

[63] Regarding "Know Your Lifeboat," see note 25.