

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 119

The Wonder of Creation

How Christians have responded to God's "book of nature"





THE OLD ETHERAL ROCKS Environmentalist John Muir (right) and Teddy Roosevelt survey Yosemite National Park in 1903 (see p. 37).

Did you know?

CHRISTIANS HAVE PRAISED THE DISPLAY OF GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE NATURAL WORLD SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

READING GOD'S BOOK OF NATURE

I bind unto myself today
the virtues of the starlit heaven,
the glorious sun's life-giving ray,
the whiteness of the moon at even,
the flashing of the lightning free,
the whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
the stable earth, the
deep salt sea
around the old eternal
rocks.

—Attributed to Patrick
(c. 373–c. 466)

THE STABLE EARTH

Pieter Bruegel painted this image of a sower going out to sow in 1557—with a town, a church, and mountains behind him. Christians have wrestled for centuries with the call in Genesis to subdue the earth and have dominion over it (see pp. 7–9).



He who longs always after God, he sees Him: for God is in all things. . . . God then is mingled with everything, maintaining their nature. —*John of Damascus* (c. 675–749)

Throughout the entire creation, the wisdom of God shines forth from Him and in Him, as in a mirror containing the beauty of all forms and lights and as in a book in which all things are written according to the deep secrets of God. . . . Truly, whoever reads this book will find life and will draw salvation from the Lord. —*Bonaventure* (1221–1274)

ALL THINGS CREATED BY THE WORD

The renewal of creation has been wrought by the Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning. There is thus no inconsistency between creation and salvation; for the One Father has employed the same Agent for both works. —*Athanasius* (296–373)

In the morning when the sun rose [Adam and Eve] adored the Creator in the creature; or to speak more plainly they were by the creature reminded of the Creator. . . . When the unformed heaven and unformed earth, each enveloped in mist and darkness, had stood forth created out of nothing by the Word, the light also shone forth out of nothing; and even out of darkness itself by the Word. —*Martin Luther* (1483–1546)

THE ABUNDANCE OF CREATION

If there be . . . eight thousand species of insects, who is able to inform us of what use seven thousand of them



are? If there are four thousand species of fishes, who can tell us of what use are more than three thousand of them? . . . Consider how little we know of even the present designs of God; and then you will not wonder that we know still less of what he designs to do in the new heavens and the new earth. —*John Wesley* (1703–1791)

THE WONDERS OF THE LORD


I sing th'almighty power of God,
That made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad,
And built the lofty skies. . .
I sing the goodness of the Lord,
Who filled the earth with food,
Who formed the creatures through the Word,
And then pronounced them good. . .
While all that borrows life from Thee
Is ever in Thy care;
And everywhere that we can be,
Thou, God, art present there.
—*Isaac Watts* (1674–1748)

Each little flower that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colors,
He made their tiny wings.
The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
He made them every one. . .

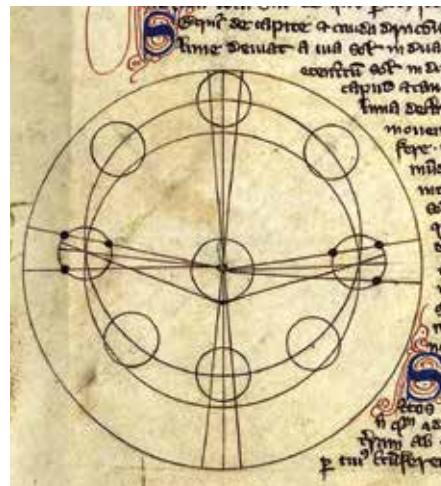
All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.
—*Cecil Frances Alexander* (1818–1895)

THE DEEP SALT SEA This 1810 painting of a monk by the ocean shows the long-standing monastic tradition of seeking God in nature (see pp. 10–15).

CHRIST INCARNATE IN THE WORLD HE MADE

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.
Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.
—*Christina Rossetti* (1830–1894) 

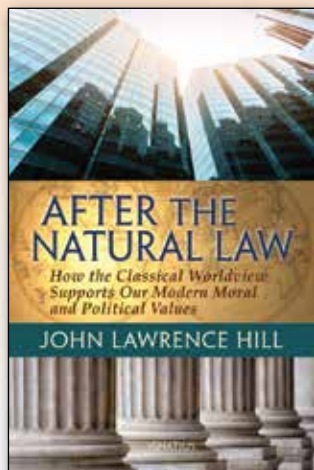
Cover: A detail of German-born American landscape painter Albert Bierstadt's *Among the Sierra Nevada, California*



THE VIRTUES OF THE STARLIT HEAVEN

This medieval drawing of the movement of the planets in a treatise on “natural philosophy” illustrates the deep rooting of the later Scientific Revolution in Christian desires to understand creation (see pp. 25–29).

INSPIRING WORKS ON TRUTH, BEAUTY, & GOODNESS



◆ AFTER THE NATURAL LAW

John Lawrence Hill

This important work traces the natural law tradition from Plato and Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas and describes how and why modern philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, and Hobbes began to chip away at this foundation. The book argues that natural law, which holds that the world is ordered, intelligible, and good, is a necessary foundation for our most important moral and political values — freedom, human rights, equality, responsibility, and human dignity, among others. Without a theory of natural law, these values lose their coherence: we literally cannot make sense of them given the assumptions of modern philosophy.

ANL-P . . . Sewn Softcover, \$22.95

“A stimulating and erudite book.”

— J. Budziszewski, Author, *What We Can't Not Know*

“A much needed book.”

— Michael Augros, Ph.D., Author, *Who Designed the Designer?*

◆ CALLED TO BE THE CHILDREN OF GOD

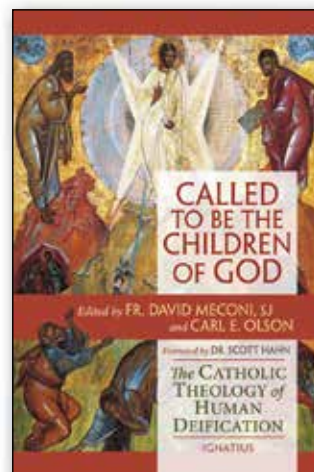
Edited by Fr. David Meconi, S.J., and Carl Olson

This book gathers more than a dozen Catholic scholars and theologians to examine what the process of “deification” (participating in the divine nature) means in their respective areas of study. It shows what “becoming God” meant for the early church and for St. Thomas Aquinas and the Dominicans. The book examines the influence it had on the thinking of St. Francis and the early Franciscans. It explores how such an understanding of salvation played out during the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent, and in the French School of Spirituality as well as at the Vatican Councils. It demonstrates its place in the philosophy of various Thomist thinkers, of John Henry Newman, and of John Paul II. The work concludes by describing evidence of such thinking in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* today.

CCOG-P . . . Sewn Softcover, \$22.95

“At last, an up-to-date, comprehensive, and readable introduction to the classical doctrine of divinization. A must read for any serious student of Catholic theology.”

— Dr. Brant Pitre, Professor of Sacred Scripture, Notre Dame Seminary



◆ SURPRISED BY BEAUTY

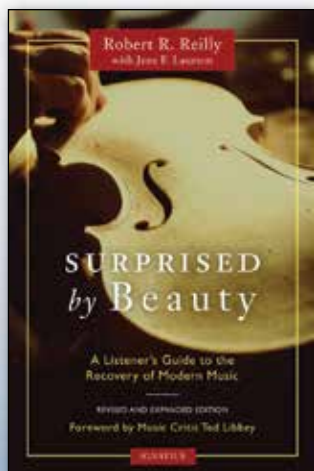
Robert Reilly with Jens Laurson

In this *Listener's Guide to the Recovery of Modern Music*, Reilly notes that the greatest crisis of the twentieth century was the loss of faith. Noise—and its acceptance as music—was the product of this spiritual confusion and became the further cause of its spread. Likewise, the recovery of modern music stems from a spiritual recovery. This is made explicit by the composers with whom Reilly spoke for the interviews in this book. The author spells out the nature of the crisis and its solution in sections on individual composers. It is the spirit of music that this book is most about, and in his efforts to discern it, Reilly has discovered many treasures. The purpose of this book is to share these musical treasures, to entice you to listen — because beauty is contagious. You may be surprised by how many musical works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries of which this is also true. **100s of CD recommendations.**

SBB-P . . . 6 x 9, 515 pages, \$34.95

“Reilly’s vision of music is profoundly spiritual, expressive of what is most enriching in human life, and capable of leading us to encounter God Himself.”

— Stephen Hough, Composer and Pianist



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Letters to the editor

Readers respond to *Christian History*

MAKING FRIENDS WITH QUAKERS

Our first order [of CH #117] was of 80 copies, and we gave those all out. I even had to put some of my out-of-state relatives on hold until I ordered 30 more. It's been fun to be able to have such an informative, well-written, compact piece on Quakers to be able to give to folks, as well as having such wonderful artwork and graphics.—*Scott Wagoner*

The Quaker issue is wonderful, as are all issues. I was particularly glad to see the wide spectrum of Quaker scholars. My book on Benezet, *To Be Silent Would Be Criminal* (2007), includes Benezet's antislavery writings, as well as his correspondence with John Wesley, Patrick Henry, and Benjamin Franklin, as well as fellow Quakers. It was Benezet who single-handedly brought Wesley into the cause when Wesley was 69 years old, and half of Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774) was word-for-word Benezet material.—*Irv Brendlinger, George Fox University, Newberg, OR*

Thanks so much for recommending your resource to our readers! Yes, we know that Wesley loved to "borrow" other folks' stuff, including Benezet's.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ISSUE 9?

I am looking for copies of issues #9 *Heritage of Freedom* and #79 *African Apostles*. Any chance that they are available or will be reprinted? With them I would have a complete set. Your magazine is both informative and inspirational, causing me to return to my church history roots.—*Milt Sernett*

As you plan to reprint earlier issues, please consider #9 *Heritage of Freedom* and #24 *Bernard of Clairvaux*. These are the only two issues that I am missing in my collection. Thanks a million for your hard work. God bless.—*George Davalyan, Arcadia, CA*

Ah yes, the mysterious, unique, and rare issue #9! How we wish we could reprint it, but, alas, we don't have the rights. Back in 1986, we were given the opportunity for a single printing of the book Heritage of Freedom. Knowing our readers would enjoy it (and grateful to get out of a time crunch), we printed the thin hardback as "issue #9." It was an immediate success. Used copies are sometimes available on resale websites. As for other reprints, check our website for a current list!

THREE CHEERS FOR CHARLIE

I just came across your site while searching for additional information on Charlemagne. It was nice to

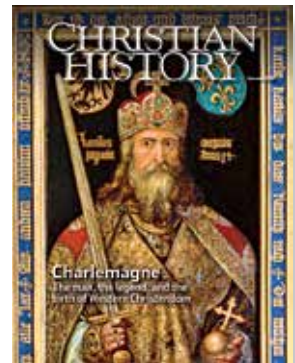
read a Christian perspective of his life. (I am a Christian myself.) It has given me some food for thought.—*Peter D. A. Warwick*

We really enjoyed working on that issue (#108). The forces in Charlemagne's day helped form what we think of as Western Christianity today. Glad you liked it too!

JUST A FEW ISSUE IDEAS

Please reprint: St. Francis of Assisi, The Crusades, and Faith in the Middle Ages. Some ideas for future issues: St. Gregory Palamas, Christian mysticism, Christian anti-Semitism, the Inquisition, Thomas Merton, the Jesuits, St. Ignatius Loyola, the Catholic Reformation, Mount Athos, Pope John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council, Matthew the Poor, Constantinople, The Great Monastery, Pope Pius XII, St. Clare, St. Therese, Evelyn Underhill, Dorothy Day, Simone Weil.—*Alex Ingles, Wildomar, CA*

You'll see an article in this issue on Palamas and Christian mysticism (pp. 17–20)—and we've got an issue (#122) coming up on the Catholic Reformation to complete our four-issue series on the Reformation. Visit our searchable website for articles on many of these topics!



CHRISTIAN HISTORY PROBABLY SAVED MY LIFE

My guess is the back issues in my trunk absorbed most of the impact. I'm fine but the car is history—no pun intended.—*Fred Smith*

Fred, this is a new and creative use of CH, but we hope you never use it in this way again! We've sent Fred a set of new slipcases to help keep his collection in tip-top shape. ☹



Editor's note

I WRITE THIS EDITOR'S LETTER looking out over eight acres of rolling Kentucky bluegrass, a barn, a chicken shed, and a few different breeds of chickens: Barred Rocks, Brahmas, Buff Orpingtons. Somewhere in the meadow there are 26 goats, also of varying breeds: Saanens, Boers, Kikos, and our herd sire, a Myotonic (yes, that is the fainting goat breed; no, I have not yet seen him faint).

A little off to the right is a quarter acre's worth of garden, which in late May is producing spinach, lettuce, radishes, turnips, scallions, and mint. The tomato plants are still in the greenhouse. Yesterday we bought two hives of bees. Today we picked our first strawberries.

FROM FROZEN SPINACH TO BEEHIVES

I grew up a city kid, or at least a typical American suburban kid: eating fish sticks and frozen spinach from the grocery store, drinking milk out of boxes in school lunches, admiring my father's rose garden as "a thing of beauty and a joy forever," but never imagining the freedom of playtime pursuits over vast acres. (I think my older daughter fancies herself as either Laura Ingalls Wilder or Lucy Pevensie.) In Sunday school, I learned to thank and praise God "for the beauty of the earth," but not until we began this outdoor adventure did I realize quite how beautiful, diverse, and fragile that creation is.

Christians have sometimes had ambiguous thoughts about God's creation. We know that the Bible tells us there will ultimately be a new heaven and a new earth, so we wonder how closely this earth is related to our ultimate home; some have cautioned against getting too attached to this earth or worrying too much about its care. Yet there's also a strong strand in church

tradition of finding joy in the creation, treating it as God's "second book" from which we can learn about his nature, and stewarding its bounty.

Christians have written poetry, prose, hymns and sermons explaining how contemplating God's wonders led them to a greater love of God. They have created art to capture its beauty; they have worked to farm and tend it, responding to the cycles of day and night, summer and winter that God put into the natural order. And they have reminded us how one of the charges God gave us in the Garden of Eden was to till and keep this world (Gen. 2:15).

So in this issue of *Christian History*, which we produced with generous support from the Templeton Foundation, we've tried to capture the essence of the work of these Christians. We'll tell the history of how they have found God in nature, and along the way we'll see some of the fruit (pun intended) of their inspiration in the form of art, poetry, hymns, and reflections.

When I look out my office window at the bluegrass and the goats (pictured below), it moves me to contemplation and prayer, as well as to stewardship and action, including on behalf of the "least of these." We pray this issue does the same for you.

And now, if you don't mind, I'm going to go enjoy another strawberry. 🍓



Jennifer Woodruff Tait
Managing editor,
Christian History

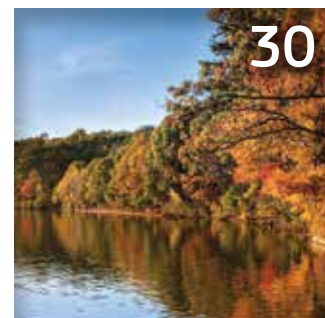
P.S. You can see more of my backyard on p. 8.

Find us on Facebook as Christian History Magazine, or visit our website at www.christianhistorymagazine.org.

Don't miss our next issue, the third in our Reformation series, exploring the continued spread of Reformation ideas in France, Germany, Switzerland, and England—and the surprising career of the man who started out as a lawyer and ended up as one of the sixteenth century's most famous reformers: John Calvin.

For a daily dose of Christian history, visit www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/today.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY



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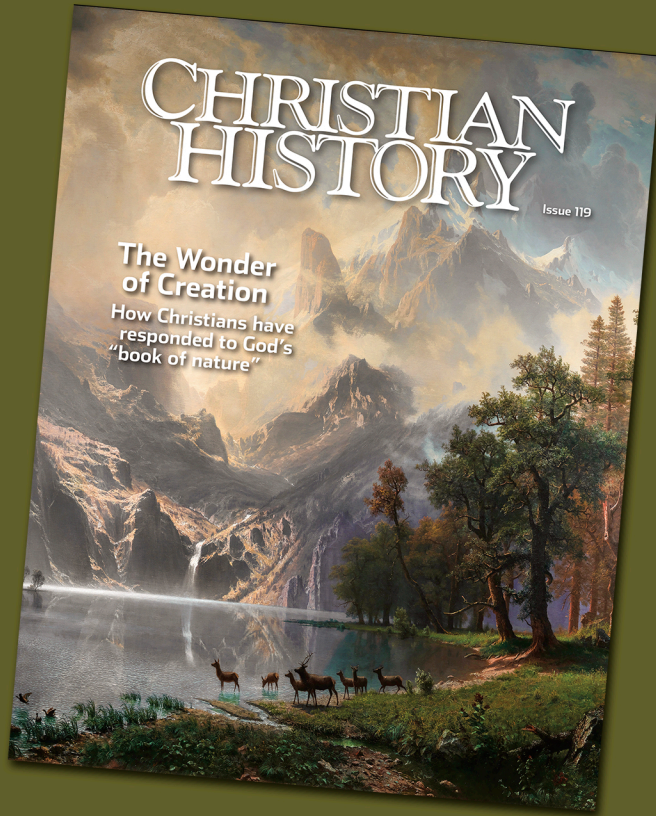
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requested but not required).



Getting back to the land

HOW DO WE CARE FOR God's creation? Christians have answered this question in various ways throughout church history. You'll read about many of them in the coming pages.

One contemporary Christian response to this question comes from what has been called the "new agrarian movement," largely based in the writings of Wendell Berry. Berry defined it as follows: "It is not so much a philosophy as a practice, an attitude, a loyalty and a passion—all based in close connection with the land. It results in a sound local economy in which producers and consumers are neighbors and in which nature herself becomes the standard for work and production."

Christian History spoke to Old Testament scholar Ellen F. Davis, who is active in writing and speaking about creation care from a new agrarian perspective. We asked her what she sees the Bible saying on these things and how we can respond. Even when you disagree, keep in mind the questions raised here as you read this issue and consider your own attitude toward creation.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY: What does the Bible have to say about how we treat the land?

ELLEN F. DAVIS: The Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament, is overwhelmingly land-centered. By "land" I mean not just the soil itself, but all of the natural world (Gen. 1–2). It assumes that human existence is bound

LET ME GOOGLE THAT FOR YOU Above: A modern farmer surveys his crops with iPad in hand.

THE SOLID ROCK Left: For many, the Grand Canyon serves as an illustration both of God's creative beauty and our human need to steward that creation.

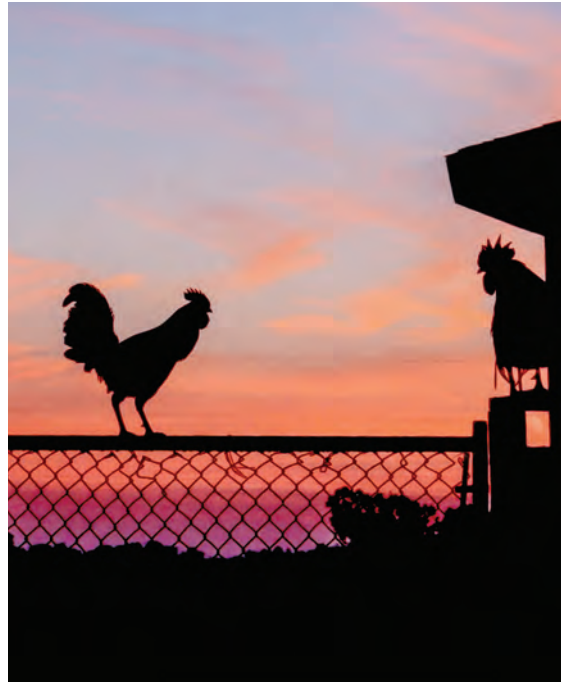
up with the natural world and that we will be judged on how we treat the earth (Hos. 4).

CH: Why do you think some modern Christians avoid these issues of judgment?

EFD: Modern Christianity tends to be extremely optimistic; it doesn't like to talk about judgment. But I don't think in general it's just Christians who have trouble hearing; it's urbanites, people in cities and suburbia, who have trouble hearing the message of the Bible on this.

CH: But does being rural mean you automatically have a healthy relationship with the land? What about modern rural agricultural practices of factory farming?

EFD: I'm aware that a lot of damage has been done in rural areas; when I was writing *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture* (2008), I spoke to a lot of farmers. There are certainly tensions in rural communities about this. Wendell Berry's *Jayber Crow* (2000) explores that.



CH: Some people have said that the root cause of this attitude is the language in Genesis 1:28 about dominion. Do you put any stock in that idea?

EFD: It's a frequently used excuse. Is it the root cause? No. If you read Genesis 1 in the context of ancient Israelite life, you will see that it isn't saying that Israelites could do whatever they pleased with the land; rather, the next chapter emphasizes human responsibility to care for the land (Gen. 2:27). However, in the seventeenth century, you do begin to hear this biblical language employed to defend exploitation. But that's not what it means in context.

CH: Is the setting of the New Testament different? There seem to be a lot more cities and a lot more urban people in the New Testament.

EFD: There's no question that many early Christians were not landowners and not small farmers. They were urbanites, living in cities; and in contrast to cities of the ancient Near East that we read about in the Old Testament, New Testament cities were no longer small areas where one walked outside the city wall to farm on a daily basis. This is unlike the polarization in the Old Testament between the tiny percentage of people connected with the royal palace and the rest of the people, whether they lived in cities or not.

CH: What about the passage in Paul about muzzling the ox that treads the grain, I Timothy 5:18, referencing Deuteronomy 25:4? Is Paul interpreting it to mean that we should honor those who preach the Gospel, so that it's no longer primarily about caring for oxen?

EFD: Paul sincerely expects that things are going to be wrapped up fairly quickly in terms of Jesus coming

ROOSTING ON THE LAND *Left and above:* New agrarians argue that we best experience God's designs for humans when we relate closely to the earth.

back, so he's not thinking from generation to generation in the same way as does most of the Old Testament. But if you read the New Testament as I think it's meant to be read, in dialogue with the Old Testament, then you see that the connection between human faithfulness and the flourishing of the land is referenced and maintained in the new creation.

CH: The image of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:2 is of a very rural sort of city.

EFD: Yes—it's a garden city.

CH: Is there a point at which you think that people stopped hearing all the language of land in the Bible?

EFD: The crucial historical moment depends on what culture you're talking about. In England the enclosure of common lands is a key moment. Some of the seventeenth-century preachers I've looked at are profoundly concerned with the changes in English life as a result of enclosure. One was Joseph Hall (1574–1656). He was a writer and a bishop, and he wasn't anti-urban, but he was against the destruction of villages as a result of privatization of the common land. In Scotland you see this in the Highland clearances and crofters' movement of the nineteenth century; in the United States, in the "old agrarian" movement several generations after the Civil War. In most Western cultures, there is a point at which some people—a minority—have mounted

a critique of massive changes in the economy that are dismantling a viable rural life.

CH: How have you yourself been involved in modern movements to care for creation?

EFD: The most significant thing I've done is to devote a fair amount of writing and teaching to the issue professionally.

CH: What practical advice do you have for Christians who want to think more deeply about our relationship with the land?

EFD: I think it would be a better world if fewer people drove and got on airplanes; we should not do that thoughtlessly. Everyone has to think in terms of their own vocation and its ramifications for the earth. For instance Wendell Berry drives a car, but reluctantly; his rural life requires it. I don't drive a car, but I do fly: I've decided it's a necessity for my professional and family life.


CH: Ironically if you live out in the country like I do and Berry does, then you find that you have to drive a car to get into town.

EFD: Yes—and ironically because I live in a city I can make the choice not to drive.

Besides the issue of transportation, in our personal life we should think about how we are using money and time. People like me who can make choices about money and time should think less about convenience and spend more money and more time on food and food preparation. We should invest more in farmers than we do in restaurants. I don't want to be seen as closing down restaurants, but we have the balance wrong; today's foodie culture focuses on restaurants, not farms.

CH: What about people who don't have money and time? How can those with fewer resources also have agency in caring for creation?

EFD: Some CSAs [organizations enabling people to collaborate to share garden produce], both urban and rural, have members who pay for their food by labor/"sweat equity" rather than money. One such organization near my home is Anathoth Gardens, and it has been very empowering and creative of community. Another near me is SEEDS, which focuses on getting kids in the inner city of Durham, North Carolina, growing things and selling at the farmer's market.

The question about the relatively poor makes evident what is true for all of us: nothing effective can be done outside of community. We each need to think about vocation and decide where we can make a witness. 

Ellen F. Davis is Amos Ragan Kearns Distinguished Professor of Bible and Practical Theology at Duke Divinity School and the author of Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible.

Rooted on Kentucky's land

Wendell Berry is not easy to pigeon-hole: a man of letters, an author, a Kentucky farmer, and an outspoken conservationist and political activist. However you consider his importance, his thoughts on our relationship to the land have challenged thousands of readers.



Wendell Berry

Berry was born in 1934 in Henry County, Kentucky. His parents both came from farming families, and Berry's father was both a lawyer and a tobacco farmer. After studying at the University of Kentucky, he left for Stanford to study creative writing. Returning to Kentucky after a few years away teaching literature and writing, Berry settled down in Port Royal in 1965, where he and his wife purchased land adjacent to acreage farmed by his maternal forebears, and he set about his life's work: caring for this particular piece of God's creation.

For someone fully engaged in running a working farm, Berry has published an impressive number of books. His first collection of poetry was published in 1964. *Farming: A Hand Book* (1970) introduced the world to his famed narrator, the mad farmer, who sees madness in the accepted ways of the world. Berry's collections of essays expound on everything from agriculture (the good, the bad, and the ugly) and environmental conservation to energy policy and the Christian faith. He noted, "We have lived our lives by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. We have been wrong."

Berry's eight novels all center on the fictional town of Port William, Kentucky, exploring a rural corner of Kentucky over a span of generations, from the Civil War to the near present—a stretch of history that saw the rise and decline of small-town America. (When asked in a 2016 interview about his reading habits what he might do next, he responded, "I am 81 years old. By now I know better than to make plans. Like the foxhounds and other true Christians, I'll follow my nose.")

All of Berry's work is motivated by a commitment to love—the love for one's spouse, one's neighbor, the land, God. As such, Christian faith informs his philosophy. As he writes in *The Gift of Good Land*, "To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want." —Matt Forster



The heavens declare the glory of God

HOW MONKS AND NUNS LEFT US A LEGACY OF SPIRITUALITY HONORING GOD'S CREATION

Glenn E. Myers

PSALM 19 PROCLAIMS, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge” (Psalm 19:1–2). Since the beginning of the church, Christians have affirmed this insight and joined together with the creation pictured in Psalm 19 to worship God.

Many of those vibrant believers were monks and nuns who set their lives apart for prayer and memorizing Scripture; but these monastic Christians also tended the garden of creation where the Lord had placed them. Reflecting on God’s attributes displayed in the heavens and on earth, they responded in praise to the Almighty.

READING THE BOOK OF NATURE

Early Christians believed that because the universe was created through the Logos—God’s

BIRD FOOD Stories tell that St. Francis had such high esteem for God’s creation that he even preached to birds.

word, logic, reason, and wisdom—creation reflects God’s order and character. They engaged in, as they described it, “reading” the book of nature. Here they were taking after Jewish thinkers like scholar Philo of Alexandria (c. 25 BC– c. 50 AD) who taught that everyone pursuing wisdom should “contemplate nature and everything found within her” and “attentively explore the earth, the sea, the air, the sky.”

Perhaps the most famous figure of early monasticism, Antony (c. 251–356) meditated deeply on God’s self-revelation in creation. When asked why he had no books with him during his hermitage in the Egyptian

ROCKY TOP Right: Monasteries have been built in all sorts of natural settings. This monastery in Greece sits on a craggy outcropping. . . .

BIG SANDY Below: . . . and the famed Saint Catherine's in Sinai, Egypt, is in the middle of a desert.

desert, Antony responded, "My book is the nature of created things. In it when I choose I can read the words of God."

Basil of Caesarea (c. 330–379), the writer, bishop, and monk who laid the foundation for Eastern monasticism, called on all Christians to read the book of nature: "I want creation to fill you with so much admiration that everywhere, wherever you may be, the least plant may bring to you the clear remembrance of the Creator."

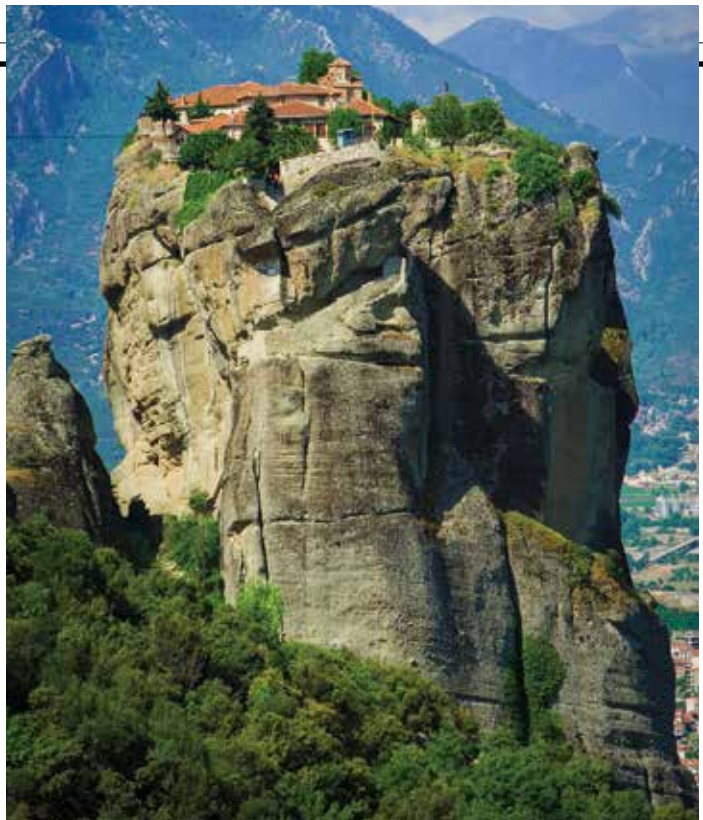
Basil desired his hearers not simply to *enjoy* the beauty of nature but to contemplate the biblical lessons reflected in the natural world: "If you see grass, think of human nature, and remember the comparison of the wise Isaiah, 'all flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field.'"

Basil's contemporary and friend Evagrius Ponticus (c. 345–399) communicated this emphasis on creation to Western monasticism. Scripture came first for Evagrius, but he also called his readers to reflect on God's book of creation, for "in this book are written down also the *logoi* [principles] . . . through which we know that God is Creator, wise, provident and Judge."

Not only does the order of the created world reveal that God exists, Evagrius thought, it discloses God's very character. He referenced Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made." Every part of nature, every created being, bears the structure and principles of God's wisdom.

CASCADING GLORY

But what does the book of nature teach? We can learn about God through nature, according to many early monastic theologians, because the whole created order is a revelation—a "theophany," these writers called it—of God's glory and character. God's light cascades down from the Godhead, they wrote, to the ranks of angels to the physical world around us to humans, in what became known as the "great chain of being." Each level discloses divine radiance to the one below it, and all creation welcomes us into worship of the Most High.



Pseudo-Dionysius, a Syrian monk who lived in the late fifth or early sixth century, thoroughly explored this worldview. He asserted,

"Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" [James 1:17]. But there is something more. Inspired by the Father, each procession of the Light spreads itself generously toward us, and . . . stirs us by lifting us up. It returns us back to the oneness and deifying simplicity of the Father who gathers us in. For, as the Sacred Word says, "from him and to him are all things" [Romans 11:36].



GROWING IN THE GARDEN

Monastic writings passed on this lofty theology of creation to later generations, and the monastic lifestyle truly communicated an appreciation of nature. Humble and down-to-earth, this strand of monastic life cultivated gardens and tended fields. Pachomius (c. 292–348), founder of an early monastic community, emphasized humanity's dependence on creation: "The seasons of fruitfulness, the rains, the dew and the winds destined to make grow the harvests that have been sown in the fields, all things that are necessary to men and to all the creatures have been created by God for man's needs."

Desert monks supported themselves—and avoided idle hands and minds—by manual labor. The *Rule of Saint Benedict* (Benedict lived c. 480–547) codified working with one's hands; it established a balance of physical labor, individual meditation on Scripture, corporate reading of the Psalms, and prayer. Those are truly monks, asserted Benedict, who work with their hands to bring in the harvest.

In this rhythm of life, manual labor was not simply a tool to provide food for the community, it was an essential spiritual exercise. Tilling the good earth (*humis*) nurtured humility (*humilitas*)—a pun in Latin. As monks and nuns worked their gardens, they may have seen parallels to the cultivation of their own spiritual lives.

A MONK'S BEST FRIEND Bernard of Clairvaux once quoted in a sermon the proverb "Who loves me, loves my dog."

Thousands of Benedictine monasteries dotted Europe in the Middle Ages. But the Cistercian Order, established in 1098 and following the *Rule*, particularly emphasized cultivation of the land. Cistercians enjoyed the solitude and beauty of their monasteries' pastoral settings. One chronicler described the Abbey of Rievaulx: "High hills surround the valley encircling it like a crown. These are clothed by trees of various sorts . . . providing for the monks a kind of second paradise of wooded delight."

The most famous early Cistercian, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), emphasized that one could learn by laboring in the great outdoors "in the noon-day heat, under the shade tree, [things] that you have never learned in schools." The Cistercians nurtured the earth by draining swamps to reclaim land suitable for farming, helping to feed the growing population of Europe. Their innovation was so successful, and imitators drained so many fields, that modern environmentalists find themselves having to protect the world's remaining wetlands. But in the Middle Ages, such methods kept many from starvation.

Thus both a philosophical theology of God's self-revelation in creation and a hands-on practice of cultivating the earth played vital roles in the monastic culture for centuries.

WOMAN-OF-ALL-TRADES

A contemporary of the early Cistercians, German abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) was one of the most vibrant figures of the twelfth century. She wrote of the cosmos displaying God's splendor: "the visible and temporal is a manifestation of the invisible and eternal." Her understanding of creation as not just something given for our well-being but as a manifestation of God's glory colored her robust approach to life. Hildegard wrote on the spiritual life, theology, natural science, and herbal medicine. She also penned the first known morality play and composed music and texts for liturgical works.

The Logos, said Hildegard, "brought forth from the universe the different kinds of creatures, shining . . . until each creature was radiant with the loveliness of perfection, beautiful in the fullness of their arrangement in higher and lower ranks." Such a vision of creation charged with God's glory energized Hildegard to write music and explore nature in practical ways.

Because she found the earth bursting with God's life, she made careful study of plants and trees and their healing qualities (what today we would call homeopathic medicine). According to Hildegard, God's divine radiance and fire fill the sun and air and flowers and

PRAISE HIM, ALL YE HEAVENLY HOST In this illumination from Hildegard's work *Scivias*, choirs of angels praise the glory of the Creator.

water with *viriditas*—greenness and life. God's Spirit gives life to each level in this great chain of being:

O fire of the Spirit, Comforter,
Life of the life of every creature,
Holy are you, giving life to all forms.

Hildegard valued her experiments in natural medicine as working with God's created order. "All nature ought to be at the service of human beings," she asserted, "so that they can work with nature since, in fact, human beings can neither live nor survive without it." However, because of the Fall, "that Creation, which had been created for the service of humanity, turned against humans in great and various ways."

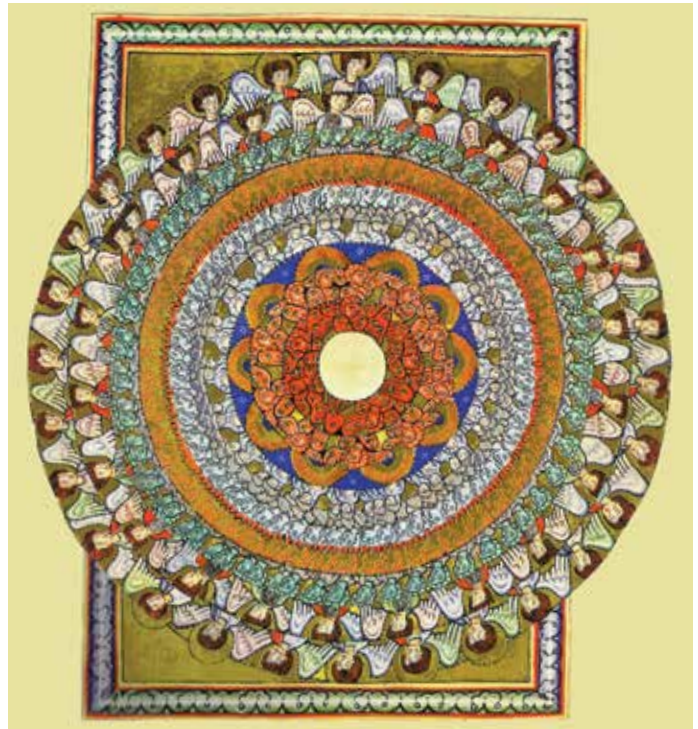
Therefore in her *Book of Simple Medicine*, known today as the *Physica*, she set forth a catalog of plants, elements, trees, stones, fish, birds, animals, reptiles, and metals, detailing the poisonous properties of some and the healing properties of others. Ultimately Hildegard placed her study into its cosmic context. In the beginning all creation cascaded down from God's splendor, she wrote; so the cosmos moves toward the last days, when God will purge away all darkness.

FOLLOWING THE BELOVED

By far the monastic figure best known for his appreciation of nature is Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226). Originally an unlikely candidate for an association with the humble creatures of the field, Francis was reared in wealth, wearing the finest silk clothes and best fashions of the day. After his conversion, however, Francis abandoned such luxury and adopted the simple life of poverty.

Sleeping on the ground in stalls intended for cattle, eating food donated by others, and donning the coarse brown robe and rope belt of peasants, Francis and the Friars Minor (Little Brothers) lived close to the earth. His later follower Bonaventure (see below) wrote of Francis, "In things of beauty, he contemplated the One who is supremely beautiful, and, led by the footprints he found in creatures, he followed the Beloved everywhere."

Francis loved God's creation, especially the wilderness where he could meet alone with the Lord. After full days of ministry—tending lepers on the verge of death or



All life has its roots in me

As wisdom is personified in Proverbs 8, so Hildegard personified the fire of God's Spirit in this excerpt from her Book of Divine Works.

I, the highest and fiery power, have kindled every spark of life, and I emit nothing that is deadly. I decide on all reality. With my lofty wings I fly above the globe: With wisdom I have rightly put the universe in order. I, the fiery life of divine essence, am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows, I gleam in the waters, and I burn in the sun, moon, and stars. . . . I awaken everything to life. The air lives by turning green and being in bloom. The waters flow as if they were alive. The sun lives in its light. . . .



And thus I remain hidden in every kind of reality as a fiery power. Everything burns because of me in such a way as our breath constantly moves us, like the wind-tossed flame in a fire. All of this lives in its essence, and there is no death in it. For I am life. I am also Reason, which bears within itself the breath of the resounding Word, through which the whole of creation is made. I breathe life into everything. . . . For I am life.

I am life, whole and entire—not struck from stones, not blooming out of twigs, not rooted in a man's power to beget children. Rather all life has its roots in me. Reason is the root, the resounding Word blooms out of it.
— Hildegard of Bingen

TAKE A LETTER Hildegard dictates *Scivias* to the monk Volmar.

Canticle of the Creatures

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord,
all praise is Yours, all glory,
all honor and all blessings.

To you alone, Most High,
do they belong, and no
mortal lips are worthy to
pronounce Your Name.

Praised be You, my Lord,
with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who is the day
through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor,
of You Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon
and the stars; in the heavens you have made them
bright, precious and fair.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind
and Air, and fair and stormy, all weather's moods,
by which You cherish all that You have made.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
so useful, humble, precious and pure.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night and he is
beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister,
Mother Earth who sustains and governs us,
producing varied fruits with colored flowers
and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who grant
pardon for love of You and bear sickness and trial.
Blessed are those who endure in peace,
by You Most High, they will be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Death
from whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
Blessed are they She finds doing your will,
no second death can do them harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks,
and serve Him with great humility.

—*Francis of Assisi*



Francis of Assisi



SISTER EARTH . . . Modern monk and mystic Thomas Merton urged others to care for creation from his monastery in the Kentucky countryside.

preaching from village to village—Francis would sneak into the woods to spend half the night in prayer. Often the friars went to search for him, only to find him rapt in God's presence among the trees and animals. Several times each year he would pull away from ministry to take 40-day retreats at the Carceri, a woodland ravine nestled in the mountains several kilometers above Assisi.

In this wilderness setting, Francis and the other friars would pray as they consumed only bread and water and slept on the hard ground. In addition they traveled several times to Mount La Verna for extended solitude. There, among the rugged rocks, Francis had his most overwhelming encounter with God in 1224.

Known for preaching to a flock of birds and taming a wolf that had terrorized the citizens of Gubbio, Francis ultimately befriended all of nature. His famous "Canticle of the Sun" or "Canticle of the Creatures" (c. 1224) is a lasting tribute to God's goodness in the world, indeed God's presence in all creation. This hymn showers praise on the Most High, joining everything that God created, especially "Brother Sun" who gives light and reveals God's radiance and splendor . . . and "Sister Moon" who is precious and beautiful.

As Francis lay dying, he requested to be placed naked upon the ground, in imitation of our Lord. Simple, poor, and embracing the earth, he repeated his beautiful canticle (sidebar) as he passed into eternity.

THE LADDER-CLIMBING FRANCISCAN

Born a few years before Francis's death, Bonaventure (1221–1274) became the seventh minister general of the Order of Friars Minor and one of its greatest thinkers. In his short work on contemplative prayer, *The Mind's Journey into God* (1259), this Franciscan scholar presented a progression of prayer in our ascent to God, beginning with the physical world.

For Bonaventure, "the universe itself is a ladder by which we can ascend into God." Following the

pattern spelled out by Pseudo-Dionysius many years before, Bonaventure described the whole cosmos—including the invisible realm of angels—as displaying God's glory to us. Beginning at the lowest rung, physical creation, we can ascend to God, the source of all, in breathless contemplation, Bonaventure thought.

The first step of this devotional "Jacob's Ladder" reflects on nature: the "origin of things . . . [that] proclaims the divine power . . . the divine wisdom that clearly distinguishes all things, and the divine goodness that lavishly adorns all things." We see God's attributes as we consider the multitude of created things, he wrote, observing their beauty and their order in the universe:

Therefore, open your eyes, alert the ears of your spirit, open your lips and apply your heart so that in all creatures you may see, hear, praise, love and worship, glorify and honor your God.

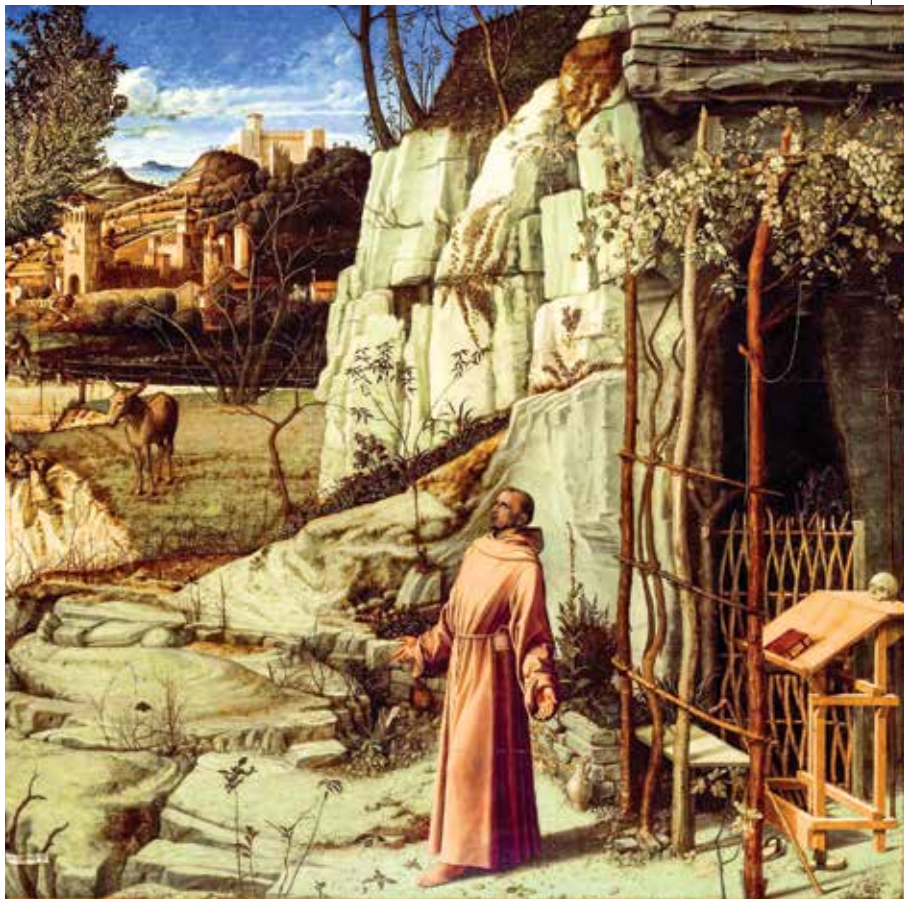
On the second rung of the ladder, Bonaventure said, we rise to see God's essence, power, and presence manifest in all of nature. Here we not only see that God is Creator, we see "the invisible attributes of God" displayed in creation. We can do so because "these creatures are shadows, echoes and pictures of that first, most powerful, most wise and best Principle . . . signs divinely given so that we can see God."

On the third and fourth rungs, we contemplate God's image stamped in human nature, especially the faculties of our souls—memory, understanding, and will. From there we ascend through the contemplation of God's one-ness, then his three-ness in the Trinity, and ultimately the ineffable presence of God. While Bonaventure's devotional practice ultimately ushers us into a transcendent encounter with the Divine, he firmly planted it in a deep appreciation for creation, stemming from Francis's love of natural beauty.

"SO FULL OF GOD IS EVERY CREATURE"

The monastic emphasis on reading the book of creation continued. In the fourteenth century, Dominican preachers proclaimed God's self-revelation in creation. Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1328) wrote: "Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God. Every creature is a word of God. If I spend enough time with the tiniest creature—even a caterpillar—I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature."

His disciple, the mystic Johannes Tauler (1300–1361), built on Eckhart's and Bonaventure's writings. When we contemplate nature, declared Tauler, and



...AND ESPECIALLY BROTHER SUN In this 15th-c. painting by Giovanni Bellini titled *St. Francis in Ecstasy*, the friar steps from a cave into daylight.

see everything "blooming and greening and full of God," we break forth in ecstatic joy.

From sixteenth-century missions in China to renowned universities today, Jesuit scholars distinguish themselves by their study of astronomy, biology, and other disciplines of science. Benedictines, Cistercians, Franciscans, and other orders continue to tend orchards, vineyards, woodlands, and pastures.

Writings of Thomas Merton and lesser-known nuns and monks in our own day challenge us all to care for God's creation as we contemplate its beauty. Many monasteries offer retreats on their grounds and welcome others to share in daily reading of Scripture as well as reading from the "book of nature." Ultimately they invite all Christians to join with them—and with believers over the past 20 centuries—in worshiping the Almighty as the heavens declare the glory of God. 🌿

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MAN, LION, CALF, EAGLE Images of the four Gospel writers, represented by some of God's created beings, adorn the famed *Book of Kells*.

Cows and pigs, not leprechauns: Celts and creation

According to a medieval legend, when the Gaelic Milesians arrived in Ireland from Iberia (modern Spain) they were met by druids (priests) of the Tuatha Dé Danann, an ancient tribe that had inhabited the island for millennia. The druids called up a mighty sea storm; the Milesian bard Amergin responded with the chant: "I am the wind on the sea / I am the ocean wave / I am the sound of the sea / I am the bull in seven fights / I am an eagle on a rocky cliff / I am a beam from the sun. . ."

When he ceased, the huge wave divided, allowing the Milesians to reach Ireland. In time, the legend says, they defeated the Tuatha Dé Danann, becoming the first Celts; their adversaries went into exile in mounds, lakes, and caves, where they became fairies and leprechauns. Few stories so poignantly capture our image of Celtic nature ties.

But was Celtic life and religion really more creation-focused than that of anyone else?

Celtic life was certainly rural. There were no cities in Ireland until the eighth-century Viking invasions and life was driven by relentless natural rhythms. Major holidays marked the turning of the seasons: *Imbolc* (a spring festival), *Beltane* (May Day), *Lughnasa* (a harvest celebration), and the evening of jack o'lanterns and roaming goblins, *Samhain*. Great epics such as *Scéla Muike Meicc Da Thó* (*The Tale of Mac Dathó's Pig*) and *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*The Cattle Raid of Cooley*) display a noble warrior culture operating in the fields and forests of rural society. Irish vocabulary was full of agricultural references too. The word for road, *bóthar*, represents the width of two cows walking abreast. *Sét*, a unit of currency, equals half the cost of a milk cow.

WATER TO MILK

Celtic religion, both pre-Christian and Christian, had an agricultural tinge. The goddess Brig from Kildare, celebrated on February 1 (*Imbolc*) and associated with the first flowing of milk in the udders of ewes and with breastfeeding, is sometimes pictured next to a cow or bearing a pitcher of milk. This legend correlates remarkably with Christian tales of St. Brigid, powerful abbess of the double monastery in Kildare, whose feast day is also February 1. One of the miracles attributed to the Christian Brigid is turning water into milk.

The romanticized view of a unique Celtic attachment to creation, though, arose in later literature. Welsh and Irish writers used the nostalgic notion to stoke the fires of nationalism in days of oppression of the Irish by the English. Later some Protestants suggested that early Celts were actually proto-Protestants. In the twentieth century, people drawn to environmental and New Age spiritualities claimed the mantle of Celtic nature religion.

Perhaps our continued fascination with tales such as Amergin's and with the relationship of Celts to creation speaks more to our contemporary longings than to those of the ancient Celts. For them nature stories displayed their way of life. To those of us living in a hectic, technological society, they are an escape into a world of which we can only dream. —Garry J. Crites, director, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, Duke University



Cosmic worship, sanctified matter, transfigured vision

CHRISTIAN POETS, MYSTICS, PRIESTS, AND PREACHERS ENCOURAGE US TO WORSHIP GOD BY EXPERIENCING HIS CREATION

Kathleen A. Mulhern

"GRACE IS EVERYWHERE."

So testified the dying priest in Georges Bernanos's *The Diary of a Country Priest* (1936), a gritty, tragic tale of an ordinary man's journey to God. Though deprived of the church's final sacrament, the priest had no concerns, for he found it all around him in the "light and dazzling beauty" of common roads and kicked-up dust.

Freed slave Sojourner Truth (c. 1797–1883) also saw something extraordinary in the ordinary, writing, "'Twas God all around me.... An' then the whole world grew bright, an' the trees they waved an' waved in glory, an' every little bit o' stone on the ground shone like glass; an' I shouted an' said, 'Praise, praise, praise to the Lord!' An' I begun to feel such a love in my soul as I never felt before—love to all creatures." Trees and pebbles as vehicles of grace—a possibility

ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL The sun rises over the Ecuadorian volcano of Cotopaxi in this painting by Frederic Edwin Church.

Jesus foresaw when he exclaimed "the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40).

Many Christians remember a moment when a breathtaking sunset or a brilliant morning landscape struck them to the heart. The praise of God has at all times included an appreciation for creation's beauties and blessings: the *Westminster Confession* (1646) calls nature a "manifestation of the glory of God's eternal power, wisdom, and goodness." We praise God, Christians of the past tell us, for the goodness of *this* world within which we live and by which God cares for us; a grand and glorious canvas on which the glories of God are displayed.



THE LORD GOD MADE THEM ALL

Left: This medieval illumination illustrates the belief that seeking God's design for the universe was an act of worship.



ALL THINGS WISE AND WONDERFUL

Above: George Herbert's poetry regularly celebrates nature and draws spiritual metaphors from it.

nature as a cosmic participant in the worship of God. Others described how the Incarnation makes the whole world full of God's presence. Yet others talked about an internal transfiguration of the senses empowering them to see, taste, and hear nature in ways unknown to them before and thus to draw closer to God. All these mystics experienced nature not simply as a source of knowledge or power, or even witness or inspiration; but as a vehicle for the presence of God, a sacrament, an agent

of spiritual reality. "Grace is everywhere."

NATURE WORSHIPS

Beauty can *move* us to worship, but some Christians find nature's beauty *itself* part of the worship: all creation joins together to sing God's praises. In contrast to beliefs that the creation is ultimately doomed to destruction once its work is done, mystics argued that nature itself prays and has an eternal destiny. "Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them" (Rev. 5:13)—emus and earthworms and giant squids and the local alley cat—has a part in the cosmic liturgy. So Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390) wrote in *Dogmatic Poems*:

The universal longing, the groaning of creation
tends toward thee.

Everything that exists prays to thee
And to thee every creation that can read
thy universe

For some, while nature is charming, inspirational, and spiritually beneficial, it is ultimately utilitarian. Early church father Origen (c. 184–254) spoke of nature only as the context within which human spiritual development transpires; Augustine (354–430) also marginalized its intrinsic value in favor of a superior spiritual reality.

Other Christian thinkers approached nature as a book of general revelation, a manifesto of God's power and character accompanying the book of Scripture. Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141) wrote: "This whole visible world is a book written by the finger of God." This concept became particularly relevant in late medieval natural philosophies, eventually leading to the birth of the scientific revolution (see "Reading the 'book of nature,'" pp. 25–29).

Against these more instrumental views, a silver thread of nature mysticism weaves throughout Christian history in three ways. Some mystics saw

Sends up a hymn of silence...

Thou art the purpose of every creature.

John Calvin (1509–1564) called creation the “theater of God’s glory” and agreed that it is not merely the environment within which humans can physically flourish or spiritually develop; it has a calling of its own:

For the little birds that sing, sing of God; the beasts clamor for him; the elements dread him, the mountains echo him, the fountains and flowing waters cast their glances at him, and the grass and flowers laugh before him.

As Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889; see p. 33) wrote, we are fellow worshipers, alongside the “kingfisher catching fire,” the exquisite “beauty of the bluebell,” and “the world-mothering air.”

Other Christians argued that we serve as priests to nature, mediating creation’s praise, giving voice to barking, mewing, chirping, and even silent creatures. Leontes of Cyprus (eighth century) wrote:

Through heaven and earth and the sea,

Through wood and stone,

Through all creation visible and invisible,

I offer veneration to the Creator and Master.

For the creation does not venerate the maker

directly and by itself

But it is through me that the heavens declare the glory of God.

Through me the moon worships God.

Through me the stars glorify Him.

Through me the waters, the showers of rain, and the dew of all creation

Venerate God and give Him glory.

Anglican priest and poet George Herbert (1593–1633; see p. 21) also celebrated this cooperative adoration:

Beasts fain would sing; birds ditty to their notes;

Trees would be tuning on their native lute

To thy renown: but all their hands and throats

Are brought to Man, while they are lame and mute.

Man is the world’s high Priest: he doth present

The sacrifice for all.

NATURE IS DIVINIZED

Many Christian nature mystics have found something even greater than fellow worshipers when they look at nature. For these the Incarnation, the coming of God made flesh, has raised nature to a new importance. These writers argued that all matter can bear the divine. Bread and wine, as wonderful and life-giving as they have always been, have the potential to be more than bread and wine; and so can every particle of matter.

Defenders of icons in the eighth and ninth centuries most famously gave us the theological justification for this concept. But some Byzantine Christians challenged the use of icons in worship, accusing those who used them of idolatry and violating the commandment against making images.



THE PURPLE-HEADED MOUNTAIN

Above: This crucifix from a 19th-c. landscape painting places Christ’s saving work amid creation’s beauty.

ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

Right: Gerard Manley Hopkins famously wrote: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.”



John of Damascus (c. 675–749) saw those who opposed images as rejecting the full implications of the Incarnation. He argued that Christians are not Manichaeans (adherents of the Persian religion that once attracted Augustine, who disparaged the material while pursuing the spiritual). On the contrary, John thought. In Emmanuel, “God with us,” God has “deified” all matter—the full cosmos.

For John and many others, the Incarnation was a sign of the universe becoming full of the presence of God: all the bits and pieces of this tangible world, sanctified by the God-Man, can now become conduits of divine grace. Wherever we look, we may see the substance of God’s actions—in wood, in paint, in robe, in cup—nature infused with “grace everywhere,” as John wrote:

I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and through matter worked my salvation, and I will not cease from reverencing matter, through which my salvation was worked.

Some were quick to think this was a pantheism that worshiped nature, but John just as quickly said he was no pagan: “Just as iron plunged in fire does not become fire by nature, but by union and burning and participation, so what is deified does not become God by nature, but by participation.” Nothing is worthy of reverence



in its own right, but everything can be a vessel of holy presence.

OUR VISION OF NATURE IS TRANSFIGURED

Finally, many Christian nature mystics speak of a sanctified vision that alone can perceive the divine at work in creation. Nature is being transfigured, but so is our own ability to see it. Byzantine thinker Gregory Palamas (1296–1357) said that the miracle of the Transfiguration is the eyes of the disciples becoming opened to see. Normal vision became grace-filled vision:

Do you not understand that the men who are united to God...do not see as we do? Miraculously, they see with a sense that exceeds the senses, and with a mind that exceeds mind, for the power of the spirit penetrates their human faculties, and allows them to see things which are beyond us.


Palamas spoke of spiritual senses beyond the five physical senses and an “inner eye” that enables us to see the ineffable. Eastern Orthodox call this process of gaining vision “deification.” Through Christ salvation becomes a journey into the heart of God, enabling us to “see” God at work in and through creation and to participate in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). A story was told of Russian monk Seraphim of Sarov (1754–1833):

Father Seraphim . . . said: “My son, we are both at this moment in the Spirit of God. Why don’t you look at me?” “I cannot look, Father,” I replied, “because your eyes are flashing like lightning. . . .” “Don’t be

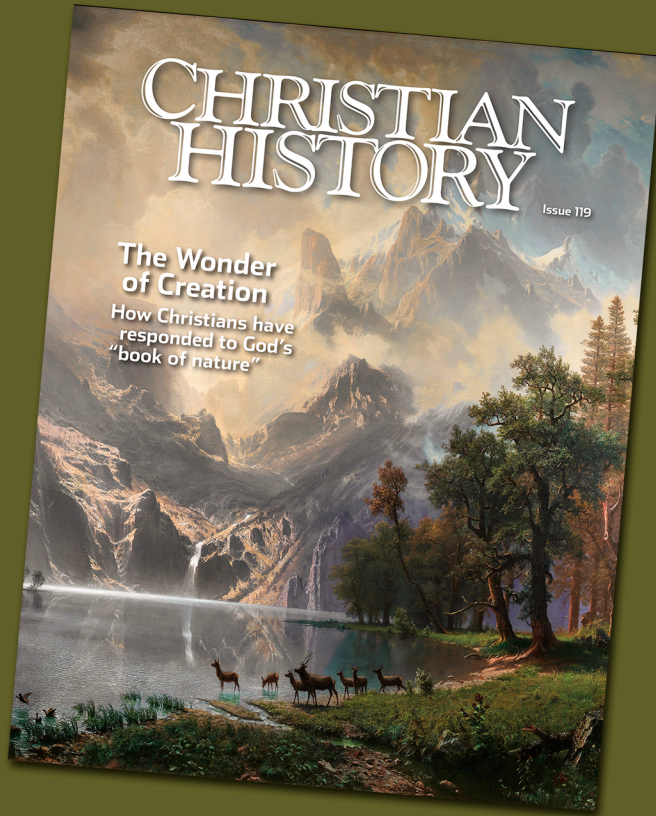
GOD HAS MADE ALL THINGS WELL John of Damascus (*left*) defended icons because he thought their use expresses the incarnational heart of the Gospel.

afraid,” he said. “At this very moment you yourself have become as bright as I am . . . [and] are now in the fullness of the Spirit of God; otherwise you would not be able to see me as you do.”

Seraphim of Sarov had an unlikely predecessor in American theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). Though we rarely think of him as a mystic, Edwards spoke of a “spiritual perception” and “sanctified taste” that enable the true believer to see and discern the hand of God. He reveled in the newly awakened senses of the converted; they see things “with a cast of divine glory and sweetness upon them.”

These and many more—theologians and poets and priests, slaves and activists and soldiers—described the new creation that Paul spoke of as a cosmos redeemed and liberated to reflect the glory of God in unimaginable ways and to bring “grace everywhere.” Worshiping God through his creation, paying honor to the Incarnation, undergoing transformation; they ultimately had eyes to see it, ears to hear it, tongues to taste it. May we all. 

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The Flower *(excerpts)*

Who would have thought my shriveled heart
Could have recovered greenness? It was gone
Quite underground; as flowers depart
To see their mother-root, when they have blown;
Where they together
All the hard weather,
Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

These are thy wonders, Lord of power,
Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell
And up to heaven in an hour;
Making a chiming of a passing-bell,
We say amiss,
“This or that is”:
Thy word is all, if we could spell...

And now in age I bud again,
After so many deaths I live and write;
I once more smell the dew and rain,
And relish versing: O my only light,
It cannot be
That I am he
On whom thy tempests fell all night.

These are thy wonders, Lord of love,
To make us see we are but flowers that glide:
Which when we once can find and prove,
Thou hast a garden for us, where to [a]bide.
Who would be more,
Swelling through store,
Forfeit their Paradise by their pride.

—George Herbert (1593–1633), from *The Temple* (1633).
Spelling and punctuation modernized.

The wonder of creation

Origen (c. 184–254)

Antony (c. 251–356)

Pachomius (c. 292–348)

Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390)

Basil of Caesarea (c. 330–379)

Augustine (354–430)

Rule of Saint Benedict (sixth century)

John Philoponus (490–570)

Pseudo-Dionysius (before 532)

John of Damascus (c. 675–749)

The Tale of Mac Dathó's Pig (c. 800)

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153)

Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141)

Cistercian Order established, 1098

Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179)

Francis of Assisi (1181–1226)

Bonaventure (1221–1274)

Bonaventure,
*The Mind's Journey into
God* (1259)

Meister Eckhart
(c. 1260–c. 1328)

Gregory Palamas
(1296–1357)

Johannes Tauler
(1300–1361)



Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada



Dalhousie, India



Yosemite National Park, California

YOSEMITE—RACHOT MORAGRAINI [CC BY-SA 3.0] / WIKIMEDIA
NIAGARA FALLS—SAFFRON BLAZE [CC BY-SA 3.0] / WIKIPEDIA
INDIAN FLOWER—SURENDER SINGH DOGRA [CC BY-SA 4.0] / WIKIMEDIA

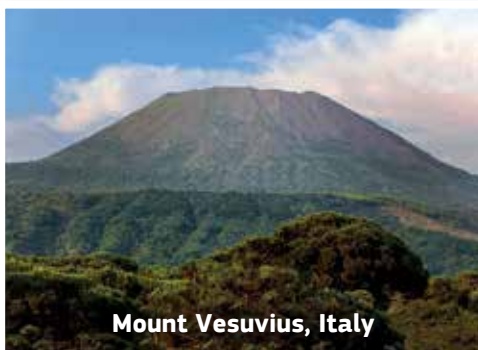
100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000 1100 1200 1300 1400

Aristotle (384–322 BC)

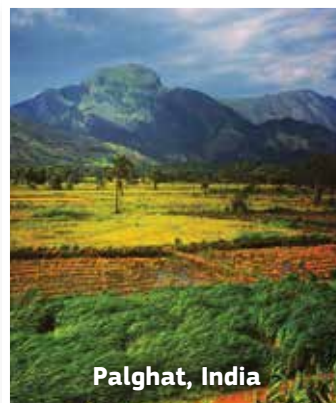
Mount Vesuvius erupts, 79

Galen (c. 129–c. 216)

Fall of Rome, 476



Mount Vesuvius, Italy



Palghat, India

“Little Ice Age” begins, c. 1300
Great Famine in Europe, 1315–1317
Black Death (bubonic plague) in
Europe, 1340s–1360s
Fall of Constantinople, 1453



Briksdalsbreen, Norway

MOUNT VESUVIUS—JEBULON / WIKIMEDIA
FIELDS OF PALGHAT WITH WESTERN GHATS IN THE BACKGROUND—SUBRO88 /
WIKIMEDIA
GLACIER—H.-N. MEIFORTH [CC BY-SA 3.0] / WIKIMEDIA

Christians have talked about God's creation as an inspiration and a responsibility for 2,000 years. All the books, people, and movements won't fit in this timeline, but here are some highlights from this issue and (at the bottom) some world events for context.

Natural philosophers and scientists **Mystics and poets**
Monastics and theologians **Famous publications**
Communal societies **Environmental activists and stewards**
 —Compiled by Jennifer Woodruff Tait

Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543)
 John Calvin (1509–1564)
 Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564)
 Nicolaus Copernicus, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* (1543)

Johannes Kepler (1571–1630)
 Francis Bacon (1561–1626)
 Galileo Galilei (1564–1642)
 George Herbert (1593–1633)

George Herbert, *The Temple* (1633)
 Robert Boyle (1627–1691)
 Isaac Newton (1642–1727)



Krucze Mountains, Poland

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)
 Charles Wesley (1707–1788)
 Seraphim of Sarov (1754–1833)
 John Wesley, *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation: or A Compendium of Natural Philosophy* (1763)
 Sojourner Truth (c. 1797–1883)

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)
 John Muir (1838–1914)
 Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)
 Eberhard Arnold (1883–1935)
 Emmy Arnold (1884–1980)

Thomas Merton (1915–1968)
Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1918)
 Arnolds establish community in Sannerz, Germany, that becomes known as Bruderhof, 1920
 Alexander Schmemmann (1921–1983)
 Bruderhof moves to US, 1954
 Wendell Berry (b. 1934)
 Annie Dillard (b. 1945)

A Rocha founded, 1983

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* (2015)



Saturn

1500 1600 1700 1800

1900 2000



Giant's Causeway, Northern Ireland

Industrial Revolution begins, 1760s
 Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798)

Izaak Walton, *The Compleat Angler* (1653)
 John Evelyn, *Sylva* (1664)

Scientific Revolution begins, mid-1500s

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)
 Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)
 Modern conservation movement begins, mid 1800s
 Thoreau, *Walden* (1854)

Sierra Club founded, 1892
 National Audubon Society founded, 1905



Painted Desert, Arizona

SATURN—NASA PHOTO (ID: 77-0844-01A) / WIKIMEDIA
 TEWCZA W KRUCZE MOUNTAINS (OWN WORK) [CC BY-SA 4.0] / WIKIMEDIA

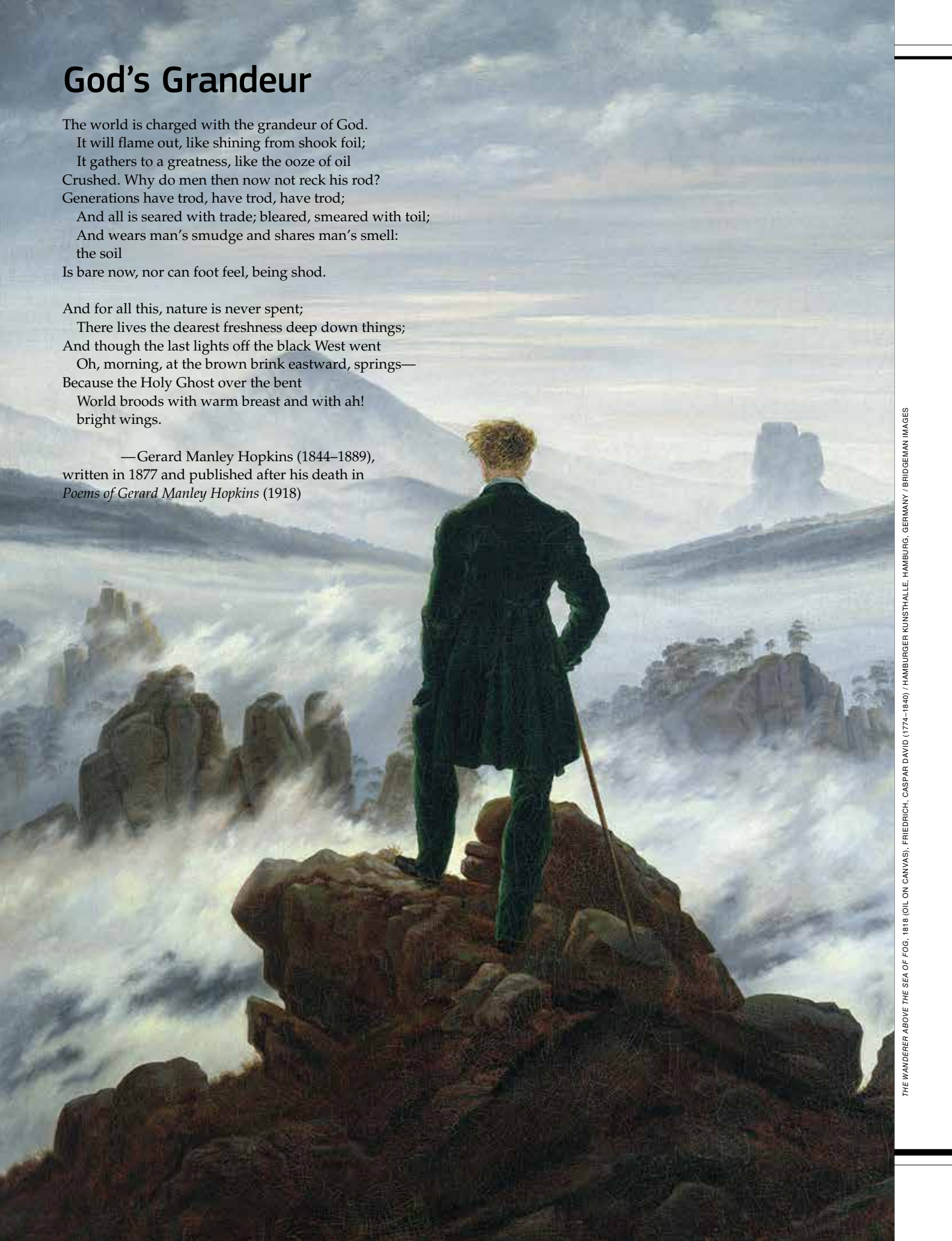
GIANT'S CAUSEWAY—JENNIFER WOODRUFF TAIT
 PAINTED DESERT, ARIZONA—JOHN SULLIVAN / WIKIMEDIA

God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell:
the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah!
bright wings.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889),
written in 1877 and published after his death in
Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1918)





Reading the “book of nature”

CHRISTIANITY AND THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

Edward B. Davis

WHEN CHARLES DARWIN left England to circumnavigate the world in 1831, he didn't come across a single scientist. The word “scientist” was not coined until two years later; so many people were doing scientific work in so many different fields that the need arose for a single word by which to refer to all of them collectively.

WHEN SCIENTISTS TALK GOD

Prior to that time, the closest equivalent to “scientist” was “philosopher,” and the general enterprise of studying nature was often called “natural philosophy.” It's no accident that the first scientific society in North America, founded in Philadelphia by Benjamin Franklin in 1743, is called the American Philosophical Society. That older language conveys a crucial fact: in earlier centuries, science was more openly tied to philosophical, even to theological,

THE SUN ALSO RISES Nicolaus Copernicus's scientific observation that the earth revolves around the sun, as diagrammed here, sparked controversy.

ideas, and scientists were more willing to speak about God.

In fact many of the scientists who created modern science during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—a period often called the “Scientific Revolution”—were serious Christians who did not hide their faith in the privacy of home and church. Their ideas about God and creation influenced how they viewed their scientific work; they launched a new desire to learn more about God through studying the “book of nature” (his creation), as well as through the “book of Scripture.”

Although the Scientific Revolution happened in Christian Europe and most of the people involved were Christians, that's not when science itself began. Natural



SCALPEL, PLEASE This modern model shows 16th-c. doctors examining a human body as part of an anatomy lesson.

philosophy, including extraordinarily sophisticated work in astronomy, occurred in places like Athens and Alexandria centuries before the birth of Jesus. Christian authors before around the sixth century responded to Greek science mostly by incorporating a limited set of those ideas into their theological writings, not by making original contributions of their own.

That all began to change when John Philoponus (490–570) wrote insightful commentaries on certain works of Aristotle (384–322 BC). But a critical mass of Christian scientists did not exist until about the twelfth century, when universities sprang up across western and southern Europe, and Aristotle’s works took center stage in the curriculum.

This natural philosophy changed fundamentally during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when ideas based on Aristotle gradually gave way to ideas now associated with modern science. Christian beliefs strongly influenced three prominent features of this Scientific Revolution: a new view of nature, a new view of how to investigate nature, and a new way to praise God.

A NEW VIEW OF NATURE

Before the Scientific Revolution, “Nature” was often personified—as a wise, almost divine, being that actively supervised natural phenomena and formed

a central part of scientific explanations. The legacy of Aristotle and of Greco-Roman physician Galen (129–c. 216) gave rise to expressions such as “Nature abhors a vacuum” and “Nature does nothing in vain.”

Proponents of the new science decisively rejected that way of thinking. Instead they reconceived natural objects as impersonal machines incapable of acting purposefully on their own. (Later thinkers would react against this idea and seek a re-enchantment of nature: see “Rooted on Kentucky’s land,” p. 9, and “Heaven under our feet,” p. 33.) But these scientists also affirmed that the Creator had acted purposefully in creating nature with certain specific properties.

It became a goal of science to explain nature by analogy with human technology, especially clocks. Astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) said, “My aim is to show that the heavenly machine is not a kind of divine, live being, but a kind of clockwork.”

No one agreed more with Kepler than chemist Robert Boyle (1627–1691). In his opinion the older notion of an intelligent “Nature” is “injurious to the glory of God, and a great impediment to the solid and useful discovery of his works”—since it shuts down further inquiry into the actual workings of the universe and makes human efforts to do so seem irreverent.

Instead, with great enthusiasm, Boyle promoted what he called the “mechanical philosophy” as both scientifically and theologically superior. In his opinion, since the universe is like a “great Automaton” or “a rare Clock,” it cries out for a Creator and clockmaker, none other than “the Divine and Great Δημιουργος [Demiourgos, craftsman], as both Philosophers [Plato] and sacred Writers [Hebrews 11:10] have styl’d the World’s Creator.” It is indeed no accident that the rise of the mechanical philosophy overlapped with the high-water mark of natural theology, the attempt to understand God’s nature and design through observation and experiment. Boyle stood at the meeting of both.

Simultaneously with this new view of nature came, secondly, a new view of how to gain knowledge. In universities prior to the Scientific Revolution, knowledge in all fields was gleaned from reading ancient books and later commentaries on them. Modern universities still use similar methods in biblical studies, law, and some other disciplines in the humanities.

Originally such analysis and interpretation of texts was also the basis for earning advanced degrees in medicine and natural philosophy. This changed during the Scientific Revolution: commentary on ancient texts was out, and experiments were in. The divinely authored “book of nature,” accessed by observations and experiments, came to be seen as more authoritative than any merely human book, regardless of its author.

“For if we believe God to be the author of things, it is rational to conceive, that he may have made them commensurate, rather to his own designs in them, than to the notions we men may best be able to frame of them.” —Robert Boyle, *An Appendix to the First Part of the Christian Virtuoso* (published posthumously in 1744)

SEEKING THE DIVINE CLOCKMAKER Below: Robert Boyle was one of the most devoutly Christian scientists of any era.



Thus the great anatomist Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) set aside the long-revered books of Galen, replacing them with “this true book of ours—the human body—man himself.” William Harvey, who discovered the circulation of the blood through careful experimentation, considered it “base,” or lowly, to “receive instructions from others’ [books] without examination of the objects themselves, as the book of Nature lies so open and is so easy of consultation.” Philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon (1561–1626) likewise urged readers never to think they could “be too well studied in the book of God’s word [Scripture], or in the book of God’s works [nature]”; they should strive for “an endless progress or [proficiency] in both.”

REASON AND EXPERIENCE COMBINED

This new emphasis on observing and testing nature by hands-on experience contrasted with an alternative approach that *also* played an enormous role in the Scientific Revolution: the application of mathematics and pure reason. Scientific knowledge today is universally understood as emerging from both reason and experience, but few modern scientists realize that theological debates about God’s reason and God’s will were instrumental in getting here.

The debate asked which was more important in understanding God’s relationship to the created order—God’s reason, which humans share to some



GOD MADE EVERY ONE Above: Isaac Newton said, “This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being.”

degree as creatures made in God’s image, or God’s will, not completely bound by the dictates of human reason? Those who stressed divine reason also stressed the transparency of nature to human reason. Those who stressed divine freedom emphasized the limits of reason in plumbing the depths of creation.

Leading scientists and philosophers lined up on both sides. Kepler and astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) believed that since a divine mathematician had created nature, we can attain fully reliable scientific knowledge through the mathematical symbols in which the book of nature is written.

On the other hand, Boyle and physicist Isaac Newton (1642–1727) believed that the Creator is not subject to human ideas of how things ought to be done—so we must start with nature, not our own minds, to learn what God actually did.

Either way, proponents of the new science provided solid theological reasons for reading the book of nature in certain ways. They also found God’s wisdom, goodness, and power prominently displayed in the pages of that book and believed that drawing theological conclusions was part and parcel of doing natural philosophy.

Newton said that “the main Business of natural Philosophy” was to show the existence of God; he thought the best evidence for this came from the

“Geometry, which before the origin of things was coeternal with the divine mind and is God himself (for what could there be in God which would not be God himself?), supplied God with patterns for the creation of the world, and passed over to Man along with the image of God; and was not in fact taken in through the eyes.”
—Johannes Kepler, *The Harmonies of the World* (1619)



TWO BOOKS Above: Galileo said, “God is known by nature in his works, and by doctrine in his revealed word.”

THE HEAVENLY MACHINE Left: Kepler studied the motion of the stars and planets and also laid the groundwork for modern optics.

regularity and stability of the solar system and the wonderful bilateral symmetry of the bodies of animals. Perhaps more than anyone else, Boyle and Kepler made the practice of science a religious activity in itself: they saw themselves as priests in the temple of nature with, finally, a new way to give praise to the Creator they found there. Kepler said in a letter to a Catholic astronomer and statesman that since “we astronomers are priests of the highest God in regard to the book of nature, we are bound to think of the praise of God and not of the glory of our own capacities.” Boyle likewise wrote, “If the World be a Temple, Man sure must be the Priest, ordain’d (by being qualify’d) to celebrate Divine Service not only in it, but for it.”

Since God’s world is full of “inanimate and irrational Creatures” that cannot comprehend their Creator and acknowledge their debt to him, it is humans who must praise God on their behalf: “Man, as born the Priest of Nature, and as the most oblig’d and most capable member of it, is bound to return Thanks and Praises to his

Maker, not only for himself, but for the whole Creation.”

THE BIBLE IN THE LAB?

Clearly Christianity influenced conceptions of what scientific knowledge is, how we obtain it, and what to

do with it—and biblical notions of God, humanity, and creation were not too far below the surface in that conversation. But, surprisingly, many early modern scientists did not apply the book of Scripture directly to their explorations into the book of nature.

These scientists studied the Bible intensely and some of them wrote lengthy treatises about it, but as a rule, they did not bring the Bible into the laboratory or the observatory, usually because they didn’t see its relevance to the immediate matters at hand.

No one revered the Bible more than Boyle, who learned the biblical languages on his own initiative and wrote one million words on biblical and theological subjects—including a book defending the inspiration of Scripture against literary critics.

But in 1664 and 1665, he published two large books of experimental observations, one about light and the colors of objects and the other about the effects of very cold temperatures—around a quarter million words altogether. The word “God” appears just eight times, all but once as part of thankful or hopeful expressions, such as “God permitting” or equivalent utterances that add nothing to the scientific content, even while they add much to our understanding of Boyle.

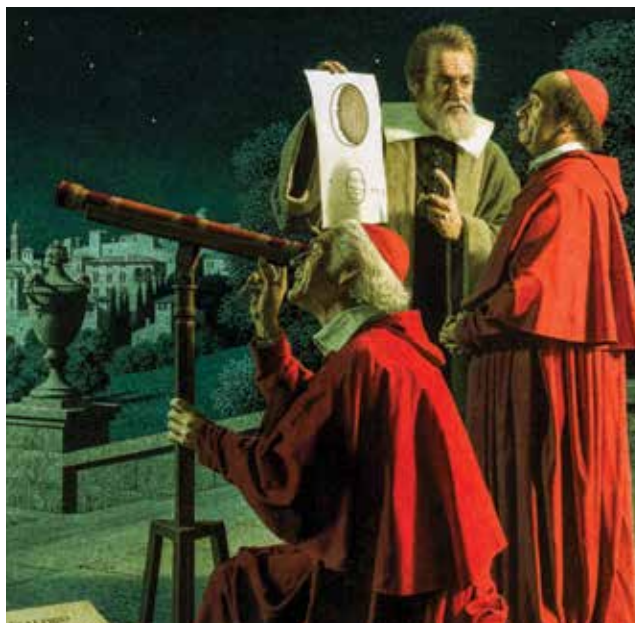
Boyle believed profoundly that God had created the natural world, but he didn’t use God or biblical texts in the lab to help him understand his observations or design his next experiment. Likewise the first edition of Isaac Newton’s greatest book, *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687), mentions God

“For man, by the fall, fell at the same time from his state of innocency and from his dominion over creation. Both of these losses however can even in this life be in some part repaired; the former by religion and faith, the latter by arts and sciences.”

—Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620)



I SAW THIS... *Left: Galileo drew these images of the moon's phases and surface from scientific observations in 1610.*



... AND YOU CAN TOO *Above: A 20th-c. artist imagines Galileo explaining his observations to two Roman Catholic cardinals.*

only once. The second edition includes a short essay about God and nature with numerous references to the Bible, but it leaves the “mathematical principles” themselves unchanged—Newton was simply telling his readers what the science meant, not how to do it.

Some even thought that the Bible could actually stand in the way of scientific progress if it wasn't interpreted with sufficient subtlety. The most famous instance involved Nicolaus Copernicus's theory that the earth orbits the sun, rather than vice versa. Sometimes the Bible seems to deny the Copernican view in very clear language: according to Psalm 93, “the world also is established, that it cannot be moved.” Psalm 104 blesses the Lord, “who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever”; and, as Martin Luther pointed out, “Joshua commanded the sun to stand still and not the earth” in Joshua 10.

BUT IT DOES MOVE

Today we almost instinctively read those Scriptures differently, but virtually all sixteenth-century readers believed that the Bible taught the immobility of the earth. A sea change in interpretation took place when Christian astronomers cautioned the clergy to keep the Bible out of astronomy. Galileo declared (in words he borrowed from a Catholic cardinal), “The intention of the Holy Ghost is to teach us how one goes to heaven, not how heaven goes.” This attitude came to be widely

adopted by the end of the seventeenth century and is commonplace among Christian scientists today.

Scientists of this era emphasized the need for God to communicate with unlearned audiences in popular language not well suited for scientific accuracy. Kepler, the greatest astronomer of his age and a former Lutheran divinity student, said: “Now the holy Scriptures, too, when treating common things (concerning which it is not their purpose to instruct humanity), speak with humans in the human manner, in order to be understood by them. They make use of what is generally acknowledged, in order to weave in other things more lofty and divine.”

But none of this means that Christianity and science were engaged in ongoing, inevitable conflict during the rise of modern science. Quite the contrary—Christian theological views shaped modern science in very important ways, while science influenced how Christians read the Bible. These scientists left us a legacy of trust; trust that the God we find revealed in the book of Scripture can also be seen in the book of nature and that God's word and God's works both lead us to a greater love of God. ☐

Edward B. Davis is professor of the history of science at Messiah College and editor (with Michael Hunter) of The Works of Robert Boyle. He writes articles about the history of Christianity and science and blogs regularly for BioLogos.



A cathedral, a retreat, a challenge

AMERICAN METHODISTS WORSHIPED IN GOD'S CREATION EVEN AS THEY LOOKED TO THE WORLD BEYOND

Russell E. Richey

ALL GLORY TO GOD in the sky,
And **peace** upon **earth** be restored!
O Jesus, exalted on high,
Appear our omnipotent Lord!
Who, meanly in Bethlehem **born**,
Didst stoop to redeem a lost **race**,
Once more to thy **creatures** return,
And reign in thy **kingdom** of grace.

When thou in our **flesh** didst appear,
All **nature** acknowledged thy **birth**;
Arose the acceptable **year**,
And heaven was opened on **earth**:
Receiving its Lord from above,
The **world** was united to bless

FOR SPACIOUS SKIES Nature can be cathedral, retreat, and dangerous challenge all in one—as this canyon reminds us.

The giver of concord and love,
The **Prince** and the **author** of **peace**.

O wouldst thou again be made known!
Again in thy Spirit descend,
And set up in each of thine own
A **kingdom** that never shall end.
Thou only art able to bless,
And make the glad **nations** obey,
And bid the dire enmity cease,
And bow the **whole world** to thy sway.



American Methodists sang Charles Wesley's words about Christ's birth from the *Pocket Hymn-Book*, *Designed as a Constant Companion for the Pious*, pulled from pocket or purse. Counseled by fervid preaching, hymn-filled class meetings, and crowded quarterly conferences, American Methodists not only lived in, but also saw *through* and *beyond*, nature, world, and nation. The little hymnbook sings out with the wonder of the created world (the terms in **bold** above), but within the expressions of awe for the world that is, we find a deep longing for the world to come.

The *Pocket Hymn-Book* references "nature" 28 times, pointing to the world to come as often as it does to this world. "Creation" appears in seven hymns; sometimes referring to the whole world, sometimes to individual redeemed humans. "World," less ambiguously, nearly always points to this planet (37 times). One hymn claims, "Strangers and pilgrims here below, / This earth we know is not our place" and continues, "Patient th' appointed race to run, / This weary world we cast behind."

"Earth" references this world over 80 times but also claims the world to come as home: "Come, let us anew Our journey pursue. . . , And press to our permanent place in the skies; Of heavenly birth / Tho' wand'ring on earth, This is not our place." Characteristically, although this particular hymn exalts in God's created world, the last verse makes clear what it all points toward: "Gloriously hurry our souls to the skies."

SEEING THE FOREST AND THE TREES

Christian hymns have always focused three ways: back to creation and to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, upward to the Trinity, and forward to the coming of Christ. In nineteenth-century America, while other groups dwelled on centuries of verse about the glories of God's creation, Methodists, Baptists, and other reviv-

CROWN THY GOOD WITH BROTHERHOOD Camp meeting cabins (these are in South Carolina) became a feature of the 19th-c. Methodist landscape.

alistic movements focused on the forward: living into their hymnody as it pointed them toward the heavenly promised land.

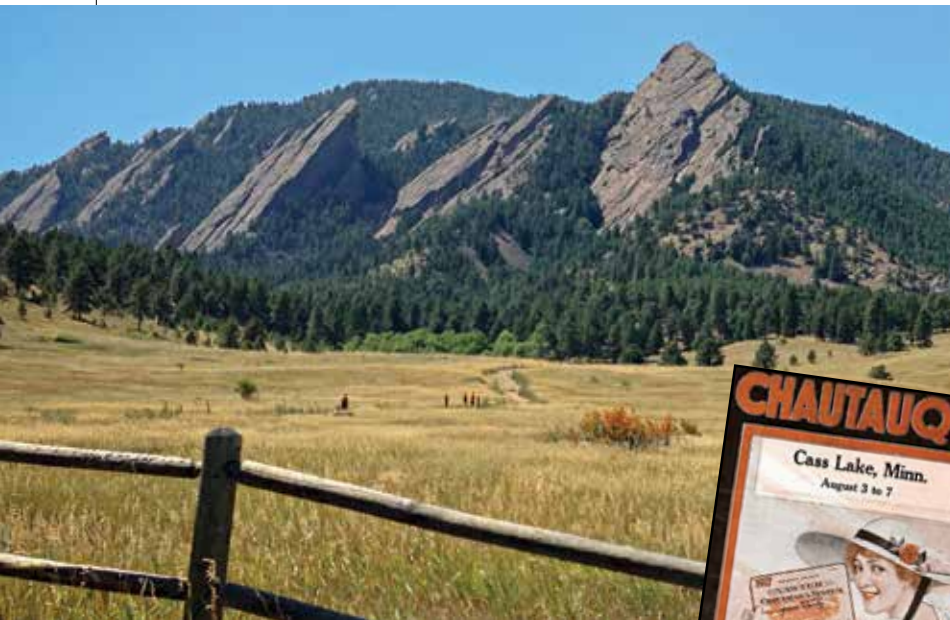
John Wesley had a broader view; he described the goodness of God's created works in his *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation: or A Compendium of Natural Philosophy*. But pocket hymnbooks focusing on heaven, not Wesley's summary of Enlightenment-era science (see "Reading the 'book of nature,'" pp. 25–29), guided the preachers he sent to assume leadership of his movement in the New World.

Yet the huge irony is this: as much as their worship focused toward a heavenly creation, Methodists worshiped in an earthly one. Specifically, they worshiped in forests. In fact, they eventually sought them out.

American Methodists tried initially to honor Wesley's commandment to preach in fields. But his preachers discovered that his imperative had to be adjusted given the blistering American summer sun. Only a fool would endure shadeless preaching in a field and expect willing listeners to follow suit.

Instead, when crowds exceeded the capacity of a home or small chapel, the preacher gathered the congregation cathered in a stately forest or under an oak's embracing branches. (Even in notoriously cloudy Britain, Wesley reported preaching under trees or in groves about 40 times.)

American preachers also soon found these natural forest cathedrals a place for solitude, prayer, and devotions. And as they took Methodism into sparsely settled areas, particularly the western frontier, they found forests to be wild and full of dangers, some life-threatening.



SEA TO SHINING SEA Led by Methodist pastor and educator John Heyl Vincent, Chatauquas spread from New York to places like Boulder, Colorado (*left*), and Minnesota (*below*).

quickening power of God . . . I felt my body quite weary in, but my spirit not of, the work of God.

That very year the Methodists Americanized Wesley's directive about outdoor evangelism in their book of church law, the *Discipline*, noting the wilderness that had already been claimed for God:

"What may we reasonably believe to be God's Design, in raising up the Preachers called Methodists? *Answer*]. To reform the Continent, and spread Scripture Holiness over these Lands. As a Proof hereof, we have seen in the Course of fifteen Years a great and glorious Work of God, from New York through the Jersies [New Jersey], Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, even to Georgia."

Woodland prayer and shaded preaching would conquer wildernesses, redeem citizenry, and reshape a continent. All these woodland experiences eventually came together in the dramas known as camp meetings—revivals that became a Methodist signature. It's no wonder they appealed to Methodists and became a programmatic feature of outreach. For 30 years previous, Methodists had already gathered large crowds outdoors and under the trees for their quarterly conferences and meetings.

As years passed and the camp meeting tradition lost its grip on the entire church, late nineteenth-century Methodism reimaged and reinvented its wildernesses. On the one hand, the Chautauqua movement made woodland cathedrals a site for extensive, national Sunday school training and programming. On the other hand, Holiness movement advocates transformed camping into a nationally orchestrated and carefully planned campaign for denominational renewal, through a fresh commitment to holiness of heart and life (see *CH* 82 and 114).

Methodists found the world around them hard to avoid, whether as natural cathedral, devotional retreat, or wilderness challenge. Heaven might lie ahead, true; but as Charles Wesley wrote, "God had also, through Christ's incarnation, opened heaven for them on earth and began his peaceable reign." ■

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Sometimes Methodists brought the danger with them, as is the case in several of Methodism's nineteenth-century divisions. Woodland meetings provided the isolation needed for dissenting Methodists to strategize and protest the church's policy and practice on matters of race, gender, class, and style.

"ALL MY SOUL WAS CENTERED IN GOD"

All three experiences of the American woodland—shady preaching spot, woods for prayer, dark challenge to itinerant preachers—defined early American Methodism and shaped the itinerancy of its first great leader, Francis Asbury (see *CH* 114).

In July 1776, traveling in present-day West Virginia, Asbury wrote of the forest as confessional: "*Wednesday, 31.* Spent some time in the woods alone with God, and found it a peculiar time of love and joy. O delightful employment! All my soul was centered in God!"

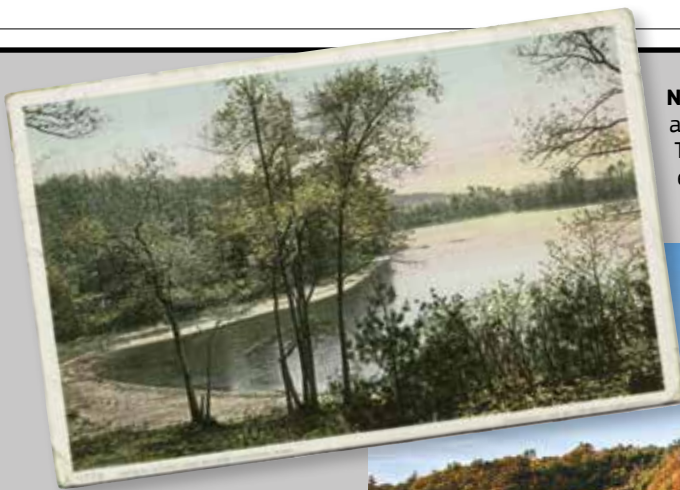
June 1781 (also in West Virginia) brought a wilderness challenge but also woodland solitude with God:

Tuesday, 5. Had a rough ride over hills and dales to Guests. Here brother Pigman met me, and gave an agreeable account of the work on the south branch of Potomac. I am kept in peace; and greatly pleased I am to get into the woods, where, although alone, I have blessed company, and sometimes think, Who so happy as myself?

In New Jersey in June 1787, Asbury recorded one of many instances of cathedral-like preaching in the woods:

Sunday, 24. I preached in the woods to nearly a thousand people. I was much oppressed by a cold, and felt very heavy in body and soul. Like Jonah, I went and sat down alone. I had some gracious feelings in the sacrament—others also felt the





NO ALABASTER CITIES HERE *Left:* From his cabin at Walden Pond, a cove of which is pictured here, Thoreau complained about keeping up with the modern world: "Neither men nor toadstools grow so."

ACROSS THE WILDERNESS

Right: In the 19th c., it seemed as though everyone was outside—painting landscapes, writing poetry, exploring wilderness, farming communally, and, famously, sitting by Walden Pond, seen here in autumn.



Heaven under our feet

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) arrived on the shores of Walden Pond in 1845, fresh from his father's pencil factory. On land owned by his friend and mentor, well-known writer and ex-minister Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), Thoreau built a 10-by-15 foot cabin. His inventory of materials includes "one thousand old brick: \$4.00," "two second-hand windows with glass: \$2.43," and "Hair: \$0.31. More than I needed," plus other items for a grand total of \$28.12. He furnished it with a bed, a table, a desk, a lamp, and "three chairs . . . one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society."

For two years, two months, and two days Thoreau walked around the woods and into town (to drop off his laundry), entertained visitors in his three chairs, read, and kept a journal. He even got arrested for refusing to pay a poll tax as a protest against slavery. Seven years later his observations became the book *Walden* (1854). Perhaps no book better encapsulates the way many Americans felt about nature in the nineteenth century.

Thoreau and Emerson were part of a larger movement known as Transcendentalism, which sprung from the Unitarian movement among New England Congregationalists. Unitarians rejected the Trinity (their *Uni* means "one") and emphasized human achievement instead of the doctrine of total depravity. They read English and German philosophy and Romantic poetry—especially William Wordsworth

(1770–1850), whose works became the rage in the United States from the 1820s on, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834).

Romanticism famously exalted both nature and human imagination. Transcendentalists agreed. They thought conformity plagued America's continent-conquering culture, and they disliked its booming new technologies: steamboats, railroads, telegraphs. Emerson wrote: "Cities give not the human senses room enough. We go out daily and nightly to feed the eyes on the horizon, and require so much scope, just as we need water for our bath."

Eventually some Transcendentalists—including Bronson Alcott (1799–1888), father of Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888), author of *Little Women*—established utopian communities to live together in harmony with nature. Most failed; Alcott satirized her father's effort in *Transcendental Wild Oats* (1873).

Many Transcendentalists sought the divine in outdoor experiments; most rejected traditional churches and doctrines to do so. Thoreau eventually left Christianity altogether, not least because he saw Christians as supporting slavery. Yet he wrote in his journals, "My profession is always to be on the alert to find God in Nature, to know his lurking-places, to attend all the oratorios, the operas, of nature"; and in *Walden*, "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads." —Jennifer Woodruff Tait, managing editor, *Christian History*



“Our garden must be God’s garden”

THE BRUDERHOF SOUGHT A LIFE IN HARMONY WITH GOD AND NATURE

Charles E. Moore

IN JUNE OF 1920, Eberhard Arnold (1883–1935); his wife, Emmy (1884–1980); and their five children moved from Berlin to the German village of Sannerz. Their new temporary home: a shed behind the village inn. Their goal: to put into practice the teachings of Jesus in the spirit of the first Christians in the book of Acts. Their vision: a community of goods and work, with an open door, as an embassy of God’s coming kingdom.

THE WAY OF PEACE

What compelled the Arnolds to leave their comfortable home, and Eberhard’s budding career as a publisher and a speaker, for this path of radical community? In the aftermath of World War I (1914–1918), Germany was devastated and her masses impoverished. Eberhard saw the war as God’s judgment on a false Christianity corrupted by greed and power; he believed the established church had betrayed Jesus’ way of peace.

The Arnolds wanted to do something to address the dire social conditions in the city. They debated whether they should stay or establish a healthier life away from the cities and invite others to join them there. With food

FAITH AND WORKS AND COWS “Work is the crucial test that shows whether our faith is genuine,” Eberhard Arnold claimed.

still in short supply, even their own children were suffering from poor nutrition.

The scales soon tipped in favor of the move to the country. Before the war began, growing circles of young people, the Youth Movement, had begun to search for a new kind of life. Inspired by itinerant tramps called *Wandervögel*, or “birds of passage,” young men in shorts and loose tunics and young women in simple, bright dresses hiked out into nature armed with violins and guitars in search of a more natural, genuine life.

These young people thought urban middle-class life held only class consciousness, cramped social relationships, and fleeting fashions; they were fed up with big cities, oppressive factories, stuffy etiquette, and dry, formal education. Social position, wealth, modern comforts, and religiosity no longer counted for anything.

This movement resonated deeply with Eberhard and Emmy Arnold. Could they establish a life that was genuine and free in the cities? Could God's kingdom come afresh on earth amid the decadence and squalor of urban life?

No, they decided; Christianity must be reborn in the pure air of nature. It must be rooted again in the fields of God's good earth, with fresh, earthy smell on feet and hands. They responded to the challenge of German social anarchist Gustav Landauer (1870–1919): "Land and spirit must meet; culture of the spirit has to be combined with work on the land."

From the outset as many as 2,000 guests a year flooded the community the Arnolds founded in Sannerz. Fortunately they soon rented a large villa across the road from their initial shed. It came with farm equipment and livestock: cows, goats, pigs, and chickens.

The community grew slowly but steadily. People joined from all walks of life; there was plenty of work and youthful enthusiasm even if experience was lacking. Living on a shoestring, the community supported itself through publishing and donations while gradually developing its farm and garden. It also took in foster children. Physical labor was considered essential to the communal experience.

"We believe in a Christianity that does something," Eberhard Arnold wrote. "Daily work with others is the best and quickest way to find out whether we are willing to live in community on the basis of real love and faith."

But work did not preclude lively discussions in the evenings, or hikes in the open country. Gathering around a bonfire or under the trees to sing folk songs, dance, or tell legends brought together community members, visitors, and neighbors—who would often, given the early community's poverty, bring along something for everyone to eat.

"WE LOVE THE SOIL"

The established group grew to 50 people by 1927, necessitating a move to a large farmstead, the Sparhof, seven miles away. It was an isolated spot with rocky soil and sharp north winds. The buildings were dilapidated and the fields neglected. The community took up the challenge. They combined three farms, built houses, and set up workshops. The settlement became known as the Bruderhof, after Anabaptist communes of that name in the sixteenth century.



THE ARNOLD FAMILY SINGERS? The community found time to hike, dance, and sing as well as to farm, cook, garden, and publish.

Everyone had to be involved in agricultural work, regardless of their experience, education, or gifts. The group had no money to buy food and struggled to grow enough. But Eberhard Arnold also believed in the spiritual significance of cultivating the land:

We love the body because it is a consecrated dwelling place of the spirit. We love the soil because God's spirit spoke and created the earth and because he called it out of its uncultivated natural states so that it might be cultivated by the communal work of man. We love physical work—the work of muscle and hand—and we love the craftsman's art, in which the spirit guides the hand. In the way spirit and hand work through each other we see the mystery of community.

Because the soil at the Sparhof had been neglected for so long, farming never really provided the community's livelihood. The community decided to plant windbreaking trees on the hill behind the houses. Hundreds of spruce and larch saplings were set out, along with cherry, plum, and apple trees.

This helped, but everything was still in short supply. Garden vegetables ripened late because of the high altitude, and potatoes only lasted to the end of spring. Although they could grow their own wheat, it was not enough to see them through to the next harvest. At times, they ate meal after meal of wild meadow spinach.



Whenever possible the community, children, and guests worshiped outdoors to experience God in nature. Prayer, study, and worship were not to be at odds with farming. Neither was the intellectual work of the publishing house. Sometimes members read and discussed manuscripts while sorting potatoes or taking turns stirring the large jam kettle.

Simplicity did not mean abandoning technology. "Nothing of the mechanical and technical achievements of the last centuries should be lost!" Eberhard Arnold wrote. "But the degrading and brutalizing of the working class clings like a blight, a curse, to the tools, factories, machines, and industry of today." For him modern factories in which people performed soulless labor with no community of heart were contrary to God's order. By contrast, he thought that in a community based on faith and love technical innovation could protect and serve the dignity of each person and the needs of the common life.

WORK FOR THE KINGDOM


With the rise of Hitler, the Bruderhof, with its commitment to nonviolence, was forcibly expelled from Germany. They went to England and then Paraguay, and the community found itself closer to nature than it might have wished, again and again struggling to eke out a living in primitive conditions. Several hundred found their way to the United States in 1954. Eberhard had died in 1935, but Emmy followed the community's way of life until her death in New York in 1980.



MANUSCRIPTS AND POTATOES Above: The Bruderhof struggled through years of poverty, but Eberhard and Emmy (left) remained dedicated to building a community in a spirit of joy and fellowship.

There are now close to 25 Bruderhof communities on five continents: many rural, some urban. While most support themselves through light industry, the original impulse to live close to the land remains. They try to grow most of their own food, to use sustainable farming techniques and alternative energy, to make conservation efforts on their lands, and to use natural materials in the furniture and toys they produce.

As well, communities practice simplicity of dress and a wholesome diet, emphasize outdoor play and exploring nature in children's education, and frequently meet while turning compost, chopping firewood, and sapping maple trees. Even communities in city neighborhoods have small gardens. In all these things, traces of Eberhard Arnold's original vision remain:

Whatever our work, we must recognize and do the will of God in it. God . . . formed nature, and he has entrusted the land to us, his sons and daughters, as an inheritance but also as a task: our garden must become his garden, and our work must further his kingdom. 

Charles E. Moore is a member of the [Bruderhof community](#); teaches at the Mount Academy in Esopus, New York; and writes for *Plough Quarterly*. His two most recent books are *Bearing Witness: Stories of Martyrdom and Costly Discipleship* and *Called to Community: The Life Jesus Wants for His People*.



Fellow travelers?

MODERN NATURE ACTIVISM INCLUDES SOME WRITERS AND THINKERS STRONGLY INFLUENCED BY CHRISTIAN FAITH

Matt Forster

JOHN MUIR (1838–1914)

Few American environmentalists and nature writers are as well known as John Muir; born in Scotland, he moved to Wisconsin at age 11. His family belonged to the Disciples of Christ, and as a child, Muir memorized more than half the Old Testament and all of the New.

While studying botany at the University of Wisconsin, Muir discovered his inspiration. In *The Story of My Boyhood* (1913), he recalled being baffled by his instructor's claim that a rough and thorny black locust is related to spindly pea plants. The resulting explanation filled him with wonder: "Like everybody else I was always fond of flowers, attracted by their external beauty and purity. Now my eyes were opened to their inner beauty, all alike revealing glorious traces of the thoughts of God, and leading on and on into the infinite cosmos." This opened Muir to another way of knowing God beyond the tradition he had been raised in.

Muir moved to southern Ontario during the Civil War and spent nearly a year exploring the region

ANOTHER OLD ETERNAL ROCK John Muir campaigned to preserve the creation he had first learned to value in a college botany class.

around Lake Huron's Georgian Bay. After returning to the States, he was nearly blinded in an accident in 1867. That temporary loss of sight set him on a path that led him hike to Florida, spend time in Cuba, catch a boat to New York, and end up in California.

There Muir discovered untouched nature. He divided the world into two parts: the impure regions of civilization and pure creation as received directly from the hands of God. In Yosemite he found the latter and worked tirelessly to preserve it as a national park.

Muir rubbed shoulders with some of the most influential people of his day. Ralph Waldo Emerson (see p. 33) visited him and offered Muir a professorship at Harvard, and Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) escaped his presidential entourage to spend three days exploring Yosemite with Muir (see "Did You Know?", inside



front cover). Eventually in 1892 Muir cofounded the Sierra Club. Over time he published 12 books and more than 300 articles, all exposing readers to the importance and fragility of the natural world.

ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN (1921–1983)

“In the radiance of His [God’s] light the world is not commonplace. The very floor we stand on is a miracle of atoms whizzing about in space.” So wrote émigré Russian priest and scholar Alexander Schmemmann in a deeply complex theological book that nevertheless formed many people’s attitudes toward God’s creation. He stood in a long line of theologians in the Eastern Orthodox tradition—going back to the church fathers—intrigued by the relationship between God and creation.

Born in Estonia to Russian parents, Schmemmann’s family moved to France when he was still young. There he attended the University of Paris and the Orthodox Theological Institute of St. Sergius, the center of Russian Orthodox scholarship. In 1946 he was ordained a priest and began teaching church history at St. Sergius.

In 1951 Schmemmann came to St. Vladimir’s Theological Seminary just north of New York City; serving as dean from 1962 until his death, he oversaw the formation of hundreds of Orthodox priests. Though an academic and administrator, Schmemmann was also a pastor greatly concerned with the health of the church. For 30 years his weekly sermons were broadcast in Russian throughout the former Soviet Union on “Radio Liberty.” In the United States, he helped establish the Orthodox Church in America.

WE’RE ALL PILGRIMS TO TINKER CREEK Above: The beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains inspired Annie Dillard to influence thousands to care for creation. At left, though she no longer travels or speaks, Dillard made a rare public appearance to receive the 2014 Humanities Medal from President Obama.

Schmemmann’s theology of creation informed and was informed by the sacramental life of the church. In his most famous book, *For the Life of the World* (1963), he urged Christians repeatedly not to divorce their spiritual lives from the physical world: “It is the very joy of the Kingdom that makes us remember the world and pray for it. It is the very communion with the Holy Spirit that enables us to love the world with the love of Christ.”

ANNIE DILLARD (B. 1945)

Annie Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974), beloved by numerous Christian readers, poetically—but unromantically—describes her observations of nature near Tinker Creek in Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains. As she explored her small corner of creation, the problem of evil was ever present; readers have made much of her watching a water bug inject a frog with digestive enzymes, then slowly drain the creature of its innards.

This reality made it difficult for Dillard to draw easy conclusions about faith; she characterized the book as an attempt “to describe the creator, if any, by studying creation.” This theme of searching for God runs through much of her work.

The success of the book—it won the 1975 Pulitzer for general nonfiction—established her as one of the most prominent American nature writers of the twentieth century. Though she resisted the label, critics compared her with the classics—especially Henry David



Thoreau (see p. 33), who, like Dillard, was touched by Christianity while ultimately refusing to claim it. (The master's thesis she wrote at Hollins College in 1968 is titled "Thoreau and Walden Pond.")

In addition to a number of highly praised works of nonfiction—*Holy the Firm* (1977), *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (1982), and *The Writing Life* (1989)—Dillard also wrote two novels, *The Living* (1992) and *The Maytrees* (2007); a memoir, *An American Childhood* (1987); and a book of poetry titled *Tickets for a Prayer Wheel* (1974).

Though her writing is imbued with a near mystical spirituality, in recent years Dillard has remained reticent about her personal beliefs. In the early 1990s, she converted to Catholicism, but by the time she wrote *For the Time Being* in 1999, she noted, "I quit the Catholic Church and Christianity; I stay near Christianity and Hasidism." The vita on her official website now lists her religion as "none."

A ROCHA (FOUNDED 1983)

A Rocha—in Portuguese, "the rock"—began when two Anglican priests and their families moved to the Algarve region of Portugal in the 1980s, driven by a desire to respond as Christians to the environmental crises of the day. There they established a bird observatory and field study center. Now it has grown into an international network with bases in over two dozen countries.

Yet even as A Rocha broadened, it remained decidedly local, each country a separate entity with its own projects. In the United States, A Rocha is developing a community garden on the campus of Wheaton College in Illinois and running children's nature camps in

PLANTING A SEED Above: This site in the Southern Highlands, abundant with native bird species, is proposed as one of the first project sites for A Rocha in Australia.

FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD Right: Alexander Schmemmann grounded his liturgical observations in daily life.



Nashville. In Ghana a mangrove restoration project is conserving wetlands; in Switzerland researchers are surveying grasslands. At one Anglican church in Winnipeg, Canada, children made jam and pizza with the fruits and vegetables they had learned to grow. "Our project here links people with food, community, and creation," said an A Rocha community organizer there. "One six-year-old girl astonished her parents by identifying all the plants in the garden—even odd ones like tomatillos. Our security guard was given 40 pounds of potatoes, but since he had no cooking facilities in his rooming house, he donated them to the soup kitchen where he ate his meals."

The organization's five core commitments are Christian, Conservation, Community, Cross-Cultural, and Cooperation. Founder Peter Harris said in a 2011 *Christianity Today* interview that the movement is "driven by biblical theology. It's not a Christian attempt to 'save the planet.' It's a response to who God is." ■

Matt Forster is a freelance writer and editor from Clarkston, Michigan.



BE PRAISED, MY LORD Pope Francis (seen here on Palm Sunday 2013) challenged the secular belief that Christians are unconcerned about creation.

respond to the charge that Judeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account that grants man “dominion” (cf. Gen 1:28) over the earth, has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature.

BROTHER ANT AND SISTER FIRE

The charge that a biblical understanding encourages “unbridled exploitation” has become unquestioned orthodoxy in the environmental movement, dating to a 1967 article by Lynn White, “The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” So perhaps the greatest service of *Laudato Si’* is the way it refutes this.

The first part of White’s argument is endlessly assumed by many as fact: that in Western Christianity “no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes.” This is the assumption that any Christian working for the care of creation in the secular and academic worlds has to overcome.

But the conclusion of White’s article is often forgotten. There he points to the man he calls “the greatest radical in Christian history since Christ: Saint Francis of Assisi.” He outlines Francis’s sense of humility, his identification with the humble Christ, and his affirmation of humanity’s shared creatureliness with “Brother Ant and Sister Fire.” He concludes by proposing Francis as a “patron saint for ecologists.”

But White makes the serious error of thinking that Christians would find St. Francis’s views heretical. Pope Francis magnificently reverses this error. The words *Laudato si’* are in fact the Tuscan words “Be praised” that open Francis’s great “Canticle of the Sun” (see p. 14; we also know it as the hymn “All Creatures of Our God and King”). Pope Francis leaves no doubt that this encyclical is an attempt to apply the radical Christianity of his namesake to the problems of the contemporary world:

I believe that Saint Francis is an example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. . . . He was particularly concerned for God’s creation, and for the poor and the outcast. . . .

These prefatory words set the tone of worship and joy for Pope Francis’s often-stringent calls for change. For the encyclical is not simply about climate change and inequality, it is a recovery of the whole Christian Gospel that shows the Gospel’s relevance for these crucial problems.

Though the first chapter (“What Is Happening to Our Common Home”) draws heavily on

Something here sounds familiar

AN EVANGELICAL PROFESSOR RESPONDS TO POPE FRANCIS’S CALL FOR CREATION CARE

Loren Wilkinson

POPE FRANCIS WROTE ME A LETTER last year—and he wrote you one too!

The pope’s encyclical *Laudato Si’* may well turn out to be the most important in a long line of papal writings on Catholic social teaching. More deliberately than any previous encyclical, this declaration is addressed not just to clergy, or to Catholics, or even to Christians. Rather, Francis says, “I wish to address every person living on this planet.” And perhaps no encyclical has immediately been noticed, read, and commented on by so many people, both inside and outside the church. Its “explosive” content is, of course, as old as Genesis:

. . . human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. . . . This allows us to

THROUGH SISTER WATER . . .
whether it runs in backyard streams
or, as here, at Niagara Falls.

contemporary science to show the degradation to creation brought about by human activity, the second chapter ("The Gospel of Creation") draws heavily on Scripture to show how thoroughly creation is a good gift of God. Here Francis implicitly answers critics who say that the church shouldn't be dabbling in science. Such critics are ignorant of the crucial way in which early Western science grew from Christian—indeed from Franciscan—roots.

In the third chapter ("The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis"), Francis makes an eloquent case that the pragmatic desire of the West to make knowledge useful has crowded out the more worshipful attitude exemplified by Saint Francis and much of Eastern Christianity, which asks how knowledge helps us honor the creature and praise the Creator.

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

Francis's fourth chapter shows decisively that a right "ecology" (a word that means, after all, something like "ordering the household") must include both societal and environmental health. There can be no human well-being without planetary well-being: the problems of the poor are inseparable from "environmental" problems.

He makes his most pointed and controversial case in the fifth chapter ("Lines of Approach and Action"): "Technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels—especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas—needs to be progressively replaced without delay." Such a replacement would challenge many powerful interests in our society, and the pope's position is a bitter pill to swallow for those who deny the human role in climate change.

Francis connects to people's daily life in the sixth and final chapter ("Ecological Education and Spirituality"). He calls all people—those of the wealthy world in particular—to question their habits of consumption and to begin to live more simply and less wastefully. He argues that we need to use the gifts of creation in an attitude of thankfulness and joy.

To those Christians serious about the practice of their faith, he calls for a Christian understanding of the



Sabbath and refers to the Eucharist as the way in which we regularly participate in Christ's Incarnation:

For Christians, all the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation. . . . It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation.

There is nothing fundamentally new in *Laudato Si'*, but I mean that as high praise. My wife, Mary Ruth, and I have been teaching and writing on these issues for over 40 years. *Laudato Si'* outlines nothing less than the good news that in Christ there is a healing of creation.

The encyclical grows from the same deep roots evangelicals have in common with true Catholicism. But whether Catholic or Protestant, the Gospel is empty if not lived out. And much of the criticism the encyclical has received seems an attempt to squirm away from the Gospel's implication for us contemporary rich Christians. *Laudato Si'*—like the Gospel—has hard words for us. That's why we should read and heed it. ☒

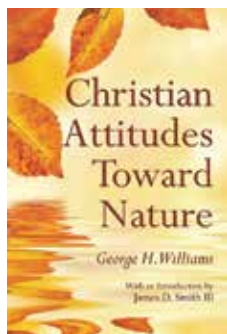
Loren Wilkinson is professor of interdisciplinary studies and philosophy at Regent College, editor of Earthkeeping, and coauthor with Mary Ruth Wilkinson of Caring for Creation in Your Own Backyard. This article is adapted from an article originally published in The Regent World, vol. 27, no. 2, fall 2015, entitled "Did Pope Francis Study at Regent?"

Recommended resources

WHERE CAN YOU GO TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP THROUGH THE AGES BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND GOD'S CREATION? HERE ARE SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CH EDITORIAL STAFF AND THIS ISSUE'S AUTHORS.

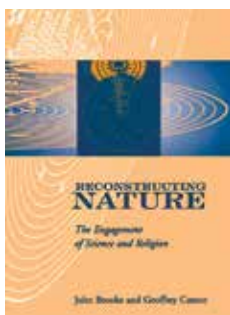
BOOKS

Overviews of **how Christians have thought about creation through the centuries** include George



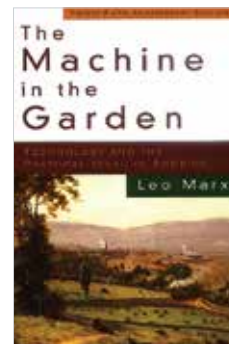
Huntston Williams's *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought* (1962) and *Christian Attitudes Toward Nature* (2015). Discussions of **monasticism**, including how monks and nuns related to God's creation, include Erik Doyle, *St. Francis and the Song of Brotherhood* (1981); C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism* (1984); Jane Bobko et al., *Vision: The Life and Music of Hildegard of Bingen* (1995); G. R. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux* (2000); Christopher Brooke, *The Age of the Cloister* (2002); Jennifer Lee Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert* (2005); and Augustine Thompson, *Francis of Assisi* (2012). The **Celts** feature in Esther de Waal, ed., *The Celtic Vision* (1988); Timothy Joyce, *Celtic Christianity* (1998); and J. Philip Newell, *The Book of Creation: An Introduction to Celtic Spirituality* (1999).

Learn more about **mysticism** from Bernard McGinn's magisterial series on Christian mysticism, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (1991), *The Growth of Mysticism* (1994), *The Flowering of Mysticism* (1998), *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (2005), and *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism* (2013). For the **sacramentality of everyday life**, we send you to Brother Lawrence's classic *The Practice of the Presence of God* (1691); C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (1964); Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (1963); Kathleen Norris, *The Quotidian Mysteries* (1998); and our senior editor Chris Armstrong's newly released *Medieval Wisdom for Modern Christians* (2016).



Christians and the rise of modern science appear in Charles Hummel, *The Galileo Connection* (1986); David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers, *God and Nature* (1986); John Hedley Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor, *Reconstructing Nature* (2000); Kenneth Howell, *God's Two Books* (2002); David Livingstone, D. G. Hart, and Mark Noll, eds., *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective* (2002); and James Hannam,

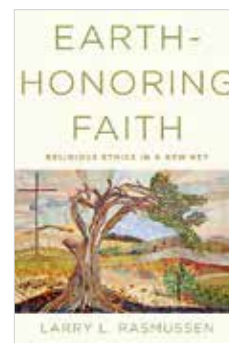
The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution (2011).



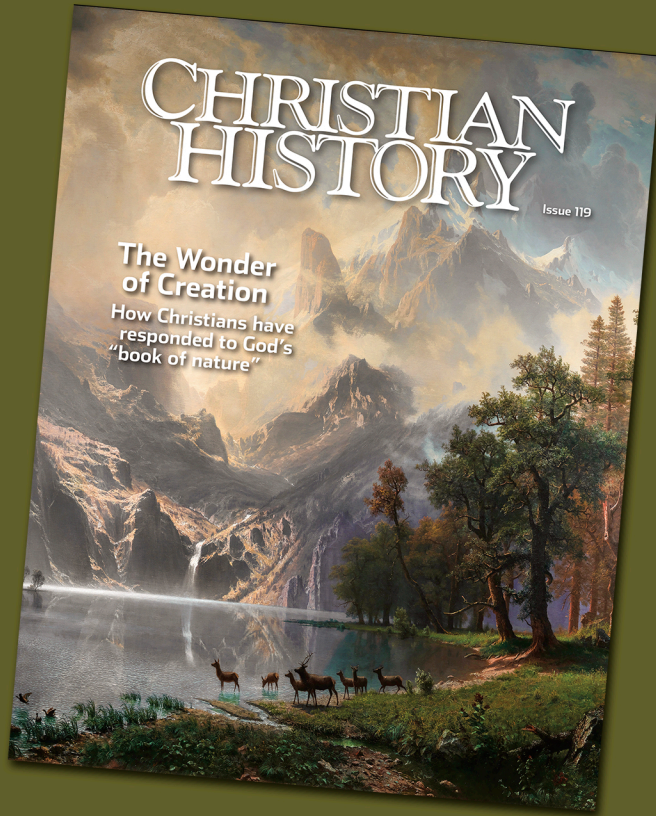
Read about **Methodists and others worshipping outdoors** in Russell E. Richey, *Methodism in the American Forest* (2015), and check out the thoughts of **nineteenth-century Americans about nature** in Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* (1996) and Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (2nd ed., 2000). The **Bruderhof**

story is told in Eberhard and Emmy Arnold, *Seeking for the Kingdom of God* (1974); Markus Baum, *Against the Wind* (1998); and Yaacov Oved, *The Witness of the Brothers* (2012). The **modern environmental movement** and Christian contributions to it are covered in Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America* (1977) and *The Art of the Commonplace* (2002); Peter Harris, *Under the Bright Wings* (1993); Terry Gifford, ed., *John Muir: His Life and Letters and Other Writings* (1996); Katharine Wilkinson, *Between God and Green* (2012); Tim Flinders, ed., *John Muir: Spiritual Writings* (2013); Leah Kostamo, *Planted* (2013); and Mark Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain* (2015).

The field of **"ecothology"** is vast and often controversial: good places for CH readers to start (some with practical tips!) include H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature* (1985); Calvin DeWitt, *Caring for Creation* (1998); Loren Wilkinson, ed., *Earthkeeping in the Nineties* (1991); Loren



and Mary Ruth Wilkinson, *Caring for Creation in Your Own Backyard* (2001); R. J. Berry, *Environmental Stewardship* (2006); Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth* (2010); Larry Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith* (2012); Douglas Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind* (2013); Daniel Brunner, et al., *Introducing Evangelical*



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Ecotheology (2014); and Norman Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation* (2015). Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974) helped raise twentieth-century Christian awareness of nature's beauty and fragility, similar to the role played in the larger culture by Rachel Carson's controversial *Silent Spring* (1962).

Many **inspiring devotional writings** speaking of the beauty of creation are collected in Bernard McGinn's *Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (2006) and in the *Classics of Western Spirituality* series from Paulist Press. Experience beautiful **nature photography** designed to arouse a greater awareness of God's creation from Thomas Jay Oord, *Through Both Creations Shine* (2015).



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Read these relevant past issues of *Christian History* online. Some are still available for purchase.

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- 64: Antony and the Desert Fathers
- 76: The Christian Face of the Scientific Revolution
- 93: Western Monasticism
- 107: Debating Darwin
- 112: Heaven in the Christian Imagination

VIDEOS FROM VISION VIDEO

Videos on people and movements featured in this issue include *Blessing Europe*; *Clare and Francis*; *Francis of Assisi*; *Has Science Killed Christianity?*; *Hildegard*; *History of Orthodox Christianity*; *Pioneers of the Spirit: Hildegard of Bingen*; *My Journey to Life*; *Saint Francis*; and *Wisdom from India: Ecology*.




Vision Video also has many videos exploring the beauty of God's created order, including *Dancing Word: Creation*; *God of Wonders*; *King of Creation*; *Journeys to the Edge of Creation*; *Meeting God in Quiet Places*; *Music and Majesty*; *Our Fascinating Universe*; and *Wonders of God's Creation*.

WEBSITES

Many of the Christian writings mentioned in this issue, especially those published before 1900, can be found at the [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#), or at other standard online collections of texts like [Project Gutenberg](#) and [Internet History Sourcebooks](#).

Some sites devoted to the life and thought of a few of our featured people are [George Herbert/Luminarium](#); [The Robert Boyle Project](#); [The Galileo Project](#); the [Isaac Newton Institute for Mathematical Sciences](#); the [Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury](#); [The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson](#); [The Thoreau Reader](#); the [John Muir Exhibit](#) at the Sierra Club; [Merton.org](#); [Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann](#); [Wendell Berry Books](#); and [AnnieDillard.com](#). The legacies of Benedict and of Bernard of Clairvaux live on at the [Order of Saint Benedict](#) website; find the Trappists (Merton's order) at the [Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance](#). (The Franciscans do not have a centralized website.) *Laudato Si'* is at the [Vatican](#) website.



Many Christians working to care for creation today, some discussed in this issue, can be found at [A Rocha](#), the [Berry Center](#), the [Bruderhof](#), the [Evangelical Environmental Network](#), and [Restoring Eden](#). 

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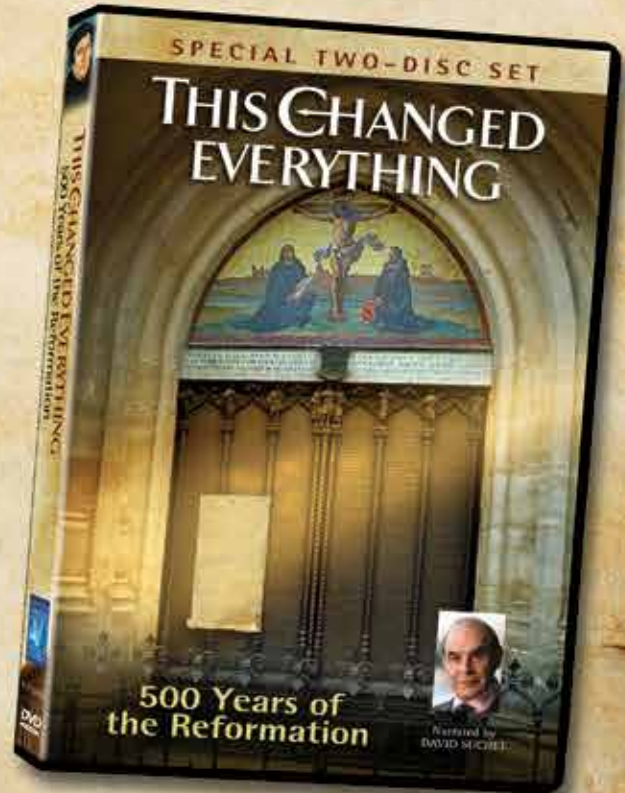


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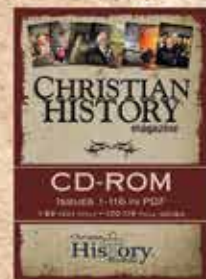
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