"This is a fine collection of essays in honor of the redoubtable theologian, Elizabeth Johnson, with social attention paid to Johnson's lifelong, major contributions to the central issues of God, humankind, and cosmos. A fitting and welcome tribute to a splendid theologian."

—David Tracy
The University of Chicago

"Far more than a *festschrift*, this volume in honor of feminist and ecological theologian Elizabeth Johnson attests to the multi-modal, multi-generational impacts that radiate from the theological work and mentorship of this esteemed scholar. With essays ranging from cosmos to earthly embodiment, from bonobos to the Anthropocene, and from Christology to ethics, *Turning to the Heavens and the Earth* is a delightful testimony to frontiers in theological thinking that have been charted by Elizabeth Johnson. Essays in the book brim with insights, and the volume as a whole coheres beautifully."

—Christiana Z. Peppard
Fordham University

"Younger theologians might call Elizabeth Johnson a 'rock star.' Although that is not a theological category, I think the celestial metaphor is fitting for the stellar scholarship she has generated over the decades and that, in turn, has attracted a constellation of colleagues, peers, students, and others to do theology that simultaneously orbits the tradition while boldly exploring new space(s) for understanding the One in whom we 'live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). Humans, nonhuman animals, and indeed all of creation are encompassed in this 'we' as reflected in the light that these essays emit as a tribute to Johnson's gravitas. Now as we face urgent environmental issues and as we extend our human footprint further into our solar system's small corner of the galaxy, the theological work offered in this collection is indeed most welcome."

—Tobias Winright
Saint Louis University

Turning to the Heavens and the Earth

Theological Reflections on a Cosmological Conversion

Essays in Honor of Elizabeth A. Johnson

Edited by

Julia Brumbaugh
and Natalia Imperatori-Lee

Foreword by

Mary Catherine Hilkert, OP

A Michael Glazier Book

LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

A Michael Glazier Book published by Liturgical Press

Cover design by Jodi Hendrickson.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Johnson, Elizabeth A., 1941– honouree. | Brumbaugh, Julia, editor.
Title: Turning to the Heavens and the Earth : theological reflections on a cosmological conversion : essays in honor of Elizabeth A. Johnson / edited by Julia Brumbaugh and Natalia Imperatori-Lee ; foreword by Mary Catherine Hilkert, OP.
Description: Collegeville, Minnesota : Liturgical Press, 2016. | "A Michael Glazier book." | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2015048768 (print) | LCCN 2016003108 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814687727 (pbk.) | ISBN 9780814687604
Subjects: LCSH: Nature—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Human ecology—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Cosmology.
Classification: LCC BT695.5 .T87 2016 (print) | LCC BT695.5 (ebook) | DDC 261.8/8—dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015048768

For Elizabeth Johnson
Beloved teacher, mentor, seeker, and sister
Treasure-hunter and whip-cracker,
Friend of God and of the Earth.
Prophet.

Onward!

Contents

Acknowledgments

The work of a *festschrift* is perhaps distinctive in the clarity with which it shows how dependent all our scholarly work is on the thought, support, and labor of many. In this collection honoring Elizabeth A. Johnson, we acknowledge first her inspiration, guidance, and mentoring, which for these editors have been a stable force in our lives for at least twenty years. We have also to acknowledge with gratitude Kathryn Lilla Cox, Erin Lothes Biviano, Gloria Schaab, SSJ, Diane Tomkinson, OFM, and Suzanne Franke, CSJ, all part of a cohort of doctoral students at Fordham in the late 1990s, whose concern that Beth be honored with a *festschrift* got this project started. We thank also Hans Christoffersen, academic publisher at Liturgical Press, whose early enthusiasm gave us courage and enduring support gave us strength. Lauren L. Murphy, managing editor at Liturgical Press, has with humor, precision, intelligence, and care shepherded this book from fragmented essays to a coherent, thoughtful work of theology. Colleen Stiller, production manager at Liturgical Press, has with similar grace and care honed the text into its present format.

We extend heartfelt gratitude to the authors of this collection: Kevin Glauber Ahern, Lisa Sowle Cahill, Collen Mary Carpenter, David Cloutier, Kathy Coffey, Carol Dempsey, OP, Denis Edwards, William French, Ivone Gebara, John Haught, Cathy Hilkert, OP, Erin Lothes Biviano, Sallie McFague, Eric Daryl Meyer, Richard W. Miller, Jürgen Moltmann, Jeanette Rodriguez, and Michele Saracino.

We thank Penguin Press for permission to use Mary Oliver's "Poem of the One World" in Lisa Cahill's essay, and to the Catholic Theological Society of America for the permission to reprint Elizabeth Johnson's

1996 presidential address "Turning to the Heavens and the Earth." We also thank Beth herself for helping us compile a selected bibliography of her extensive published work, which appears at the end of this text.

There is also a parade of generous, compassionate, and witty friends, who have accompanied us, watched our kids, answered our questions, cheered us on, filled our wine glasses, and given us hope. In no particular order: Linda Land-Closson, Grant Gallicho, Jim Keane, Mike and Mary McManus, Rori and Debbie Knudtson, Russ Arnold, Brenna Moore, Maureen O'Connell, Christine Firer Hinze and Brad Hinze.

Julia Brumbaugh acknowledges Regis University, particularly the religious studies department and its chair, Kari Kloos, as well as the dean of Regis College, Thomas Bowie, for support, both personal and professional, and particularly for the gift of a sabbatical. Natalia Imperatori-Lee thanks Manhattan College for the sabbatical grant, as well as the year-round support of her department, chaired by Michele Saracino, that afforded her the time and resources to bring this project to completion.

It goes without saying, though it is not repeated enough, that we both thank our families. Their patience with our partial attention and deadline stress has been extensive, and their support of this project and all our endeavors has been unambiguously enthusiastic. For that, and much else, we are so grateful.

Foreword

Mary Catherine Hilkert, OP

Elizabeth Johnson once remarked that "the gift of a new question may be the best possible present of all."[1] This volume offers ample testimony to the fact that she has been gifting the church, the academy, her students, and a wider reading public with new questions—and creative responses—for over three decades. Rich and diverse as her theological insights have been, her writing always returns to the heart of the matter—the question of God. A true friend of God and a prophet, this disciple of Wisdom has prepared theological feasts and nourished women and men hungry for meaning and hope in a secular, suffering, and violent world since the early 1980s.

The first line of Beth's dissertation set the stage for her theological pilgrimage in the decades to follow: "A crucial, if not the most basic question of all theology is the question of the right way to speak of God."[2] The mystery of God and God's love for all of her beloved creatures—including the Earth and the entire cosmos—has been at the heart of Beth's own lifelong quest for the Living God. The diverse questions that she has engaged along the way also reflect her perceptive attention to the concerns of her many readers who join her in that search, even if they do not always share her faith convictions.

[1] Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Pneumatology and Beyond: 'Whatever,'" in *The Theology of Cardinal Walter Kasper: Speaking Truth in Love*, ed. Kristin M. Colberg and Robert A. Krieg (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 98–109, at 105.

[2] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Analogy and Doxology," *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 211, cited in Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Analogy and Doxology and Their Connection with Christology in the Thought of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1981), 1.

To borrow a refrain from the litany of thanksgiving at Passover in which the Jewish faith community remembers and celebrates God's many blessings, *it would have been enough* if this gifted theologian had focused her life's work on the key insight that theological speech always falls short of expressing the unfathomable mystery of God.

Likewise, *it would have been enough* had Elizabeth Johnson explored the question at the heart of Christian faith: What does it mean to believe that the God of Love has become one with humankind and the cosmos in the Word become flesh—Jesus, the incarnate Wisdom of God—and to follow in faithful discipleship? When invited by the South African Bishops' Conference to engage those questions with clergy and religious educators in South Africa during the apartheid era, she drew on her many years of studying and teaching Christology in a series of lectures later published in the widely used text, C*onsider Jesus* (see Heb 3:1).

In her next step on the quest to find a more inclusive way to "speak rightly of God," Beth forged a new pathway as she set out "to braid a footbridge between the ledges of classical and feminist Christian wisdom" in her groundbreaking volume *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. The expressed aim of that now-classic work, which received the 1992 Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Religion, describes her broader theological project as well: "My aim in what follows is to speak a good word about the mystery of God recognizable within the contours of Christian faith that will serve the emancipatory praxis of women and men, to the benefit of all creation, both human beings and the earth."[3] *It would have been enough.*

When she was asked to deliver the Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality at St. Mary's College a year later, Beth focused the lens of her theological imagination more explicitly on the connection between pneumatology, feminist theology, and ecological theology in *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*. This time her angle of vision highlighted the interconnectedness of the Creator God's love of and concern for plants, animals, the ocean, the blue planet Earth, and all things living with her ongoing concern for the well-being and flourishing of women and girls around the globe who live in systems that fail to recognize their full dignity and the wisdom emerging from their diverse experiences.

[3] Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 8.

Reminding her readers that "we are as large as our loves," she called for a deeper share in the Creator Spirit's compassionate desire for "a flourishing humanity on a thriving earth."

It would have been enough. But Beth's religious sensibilities—at once clearly feminist and deeply Catholic—as well as the questions of her students and wide readership led to her next project: the development of a contemporary theology of Mary of Nazareth within the broader communion of saints, research that resulted in two more award-winning volumes: *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (winner of the American Academy of Religion's Excellence in the Study of Religion Award in 1999) and *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (College Theology Society Book of the Year Award, 2004).

Since the readership of that two-volume exploration of Mary and the broader communion of saints might have been limited primarily to scholars and students, Johnson published the final section of *Truly Our Sister*, a mosaic of feminist biblical insights on Miriam of Nazareth (both her own and those of colleagues whose work she gratefully acknowledged), as a pastoral resource titled *Dangerous Memories: A Mosaic of Mary in Scripture* the following year.

It would have been enough. But Johnson's next sabbatical afforded her the time to return to her abiding theological and pastoral concern in *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (2007). That volume, which she described fondly as her "little God book," was not intended as an original constructive work. Rather, her expressed purpose was to explore the diverse responses of the broader theological community to the questions of what Christians mean when they profess, "We believe in one God," and what that proclamation demands of Christians situated in a world of religious pluralism as well as atheism and faced with global threats to God's beloved children and endangered creation. When that volume received unexpected criticism and its contents were misrepresented in a public document issued by a committee of US bishops several years later and a media frenzy followed, Elizabeth Johnson did what she has always done best: she wrote a measured, but clear, statement of what it means to be a Catholic theologian charged with the responsibility of speaking of God in the contemporary world. She welcomed criticism of her scholarship, both ecclesial and academic, but also stood her ground, stating, "I am not responsible for what I have not written and do not think."

In the shadow of that controversy and with her many other responsibilities, it would have been understandable if Elizabeth Johnson had chosen to turn her next research leave into a well-deserved personal sabbatical. Instead, she turned her attention to the work that she had been urging her theological colleagues to embrace since the time of her presidential address to the Catholic Theological Society of America in 1996: the pressing theological and ecological need for theologians to "turn to the heavens and the earth." After engaging in a year-long study of Charles Darwin's O*rigin of the Species* with an interdisciplinary group of colleagues at Fordham University, Beth crafted her own theological contribution to that dialogue—*Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*. In the year before Pope Francis penned his prophetic encyclical *Laudato Sì*, Johnson published her own summons for Christians, other religious believers, and the broader human community to recognize our kinship with all creatures and embrace our shared ecological vocation to care for the living world and all its creatures with special concern for the most vulnerable. Returning to her abiding concern for the living God, now with a more explicit focus on God's own love of the Earth, Beth reminded her readers that the call to ecological conversion is an urgent call "to love in tune with God's abundant love so that all may have life."[4]

In over three decades of creative scholarship Elizabeth Johnson repeatedly has broken new ground, tilled the soil, and planted seeds for future harvesting of the abundant wisdom of the Christian tradition as a source of life and hope for all of creation. *It would have been enough*. Yet Johnson is no ivory-tower academic. Much as she treasures her study, she is equally if not more at home in the classroom and the numerous academic, pastoral, and public settings where she has been invited to "share the fruits of her contemplation with others" (in the language of Thomas Aquinas's Dominican tradition). For that reason it is fitting that this volume of essays in her honor includes not only the voices of colleagues with whom Beth has shared theological conversations over many years but also the insights of newer scholars whom she has mentored and inspired to speak in their own voices of the Living God and of all that God loves, "to practical critical effect."

[4] Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 285.

Thank you, Beth, and thanks to your colleagues and students, for your questions—and for calling all of us to praise, to lament, and to act on behalf of all of God's beloved creation.

Prologue

A Time for Every Purpose

Kathy Coffey

Elizabeth Johnson writes and speaks about what matters most: the nature of God, the relationships of men and women, the peril to the earth. In her recent writings about the earth, she captures the excitement of the human adventure on this planet. You could get up in the morning—practically whistling—for the sake of such a bold, intriguing vision. Or you could hum "To Everything There Is a Season," with its chorus of "turn, turn, turn." Johnson has initiated or been part of the most important theological turnings in our era.

A pioneer in environmental theology, as in many other fields, Johnson develops the framework and builds the intellectual scaffolding for the hard and genuine work ahead. Her labor to root the current ecological crisis in the long tradition of Catholic theology demonstrates that saving our habitat isn't just sentimental "love the butterflies" drek. Rather, it is a compelling call to honor the Creator of this beautiful, threatened home. Like other prophets before her, she may not be popular. But she's courageous. And she's right.

Furthermore, she anticipated Pope Francis's environmental encyclical *Laudato Sì* by twenty years. She underscores similar themes: the elegance of a complex system; the danger of concentrated greenhouse gases; the risk to the poor; the destruction of biological diversity; the contamination of water, air, and earth; and the condemnation of ruthless exploitation. Most importantly, both prophetic voices see the world not as a problem to be solved but as "a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise."

Johnson's current focus stands in a continuum with her previous work. People who'd never read *She Who Is* were nonetheless empowered by her message of women's full personhood and flourishing. I'd present her creative ideas in writing or in talks to diverse audiences: parish groups, diocesan conventions and retreatants, who'd sit up and take notice, even to the work "in translation" from the original, more academic form. So too her bold stand on the environment compels us to popularize it for those who will make a difference: energetic youth, earth care committees, ordinary pew people who wield enormous collective power to turn down the thermostat, walk or cycle—not drive—recycle, boycott, vote, and use alternative energy sources.

One thing that makes Johnson's work so exciting is its emphasis on action: *She Who Is* gave us a dynamic sense of the Spirit's activity through verbs like vivify, sustain, renew, liberate, knit together, heal, ignite, purify, strengthen, cleanse, restore, play music, quicken, warm, bless, and awaken hope. Now Johnson draws our attention to a world exploding with daily discoveries, an "open-ended adventure" full of mystery and enchantment. Nature bears the divine promise, reveals the creator, and is filled with surprise. Creation is a "book" about God or a pathway leading to God; therefore its ruin is a matter for grave concern. Damage to the planet also damages the people, especially the most vulnerable; she underscores the connection between social injustice and ecological destruction, drawing us to a radically improved order.

What we may once have conceived as static hierarchy, she invites us to revision as "a circle of the community of life." So too we may have once thought God was the male atop the patriarchal ladder. She deftly changes our calcified attitudes through uplifting participation in a great adventure, never by coercing. Her style avoids heavy-handed preachiness, or telling us unconvincingly, "eat it; it's good for you" as a glob of slimy, overcooked spinach slides onto the plate. She invites us to become the "cantors of the universe," in Abraham Heschel's phrase, who not only praise its magnificence but do all we can to preserve it. How could we refuse such a charming, invigorating invitation?

As a writer, I appreciate her accessible style and graphic metaphors. Like Teresa of Avila and Therese of Lisieux, she prefers concreteness to abstractions: the Spirit like water in three forms, or the root, shoot, and fruit of a tree. She poses the risk to the planet in stark terms that aren't overly nuanced: wonder or waste. And every now and then she

throws in a phrase like "the whole shebang" or "unholy litany" to wake up those accustomed to dozing through theological discourses.

Johnson empowers by reminding that our healthy, thoughtful changes participate in God's lively and gracious being. God's bounty overflows into humans and quickens our life; we are God's partners in helping creation heal and thrive. Just as she softens and adds humor to her CTSA address by including Ellery, the goldfish Annie Dillard bought for twenty-five cents, so I'll end with a personal example. My three-year-old grandson Sawyer and I are big fans of the classes for toddlers offered on San Francisco Bay. We've learned about sharks, snowy egrets, salty pickleweed, sandpipers, and tides.

Having little background in science, I'm just as enthralled as he when a naturalist teaches us to distinguish the male from the female crab. (The former has a triangle on its belly; the latter, a half-circle.) Equipped with nets, the children in the class turn over rocks to find a plethora of life forms beneath. With shouts of glee, they capture snails and crabs, placing them in a large, water-filled pan for closer observation. Then, they carefully return the stones to their original places, and gingerly restore the creatures to their habitat.

That last word wasn't even part of my vocabulary until recently; the toddlers use it with ease and seem to understand it. Predictions of global warming mean the shore and marshlands where we study now will be gone when Sawyer is thirty-three. But part of me greets the predictions with a slight degree of skepticism. The threat, without a doubt, is real. But there is also room for hope. With Elizabeth Johnson, Pope Francis, and the toddler brigade working on the problem, maybe another magnificent turn will occur. By bringing the weight of theologians to bear on this pressing issue, and shifting the axis toward the cosmological agenda, Johnson has moved world attention from a narrow, subjective focus toward a vast and crucial arena. By voicing and orchestrating this graceful turn, she has set us on course toward reverence for the natural world, a hierarchy redesigned as a circle, sustainability, diminished greed, a new flourishing for both humans and the natural order. We, in turn, owe Dr. Johnson our deepest appreciation.

Introduction

Julia Brumbaugh and Natalia Imperatori-Lee

Classical definitions of theology tell us that theology is speech about God and faith seeking understanding. And yet perhaps the most powerful insight Elizabeth Johnson's work argues for is that theology matters for living. Theology is that discipline of intellectual, moral, and spiritual integrity that reflects on Christian belief in the context of the life of the church, the people of God, in the light of the world as it is. Theology develops in the context of that life of faith and in dialogue with it, but it also challenges, cajoles, invites, and inspires believers to live Christian life more fully. Theologians assume that how we talk about God, Christ, the world, and each other matters. Or, as Elizabeth Johnson would put it, "the symbol of God functions."[1] The idea of God and all the ideas that intersect with God—which is everything—matter. Ideas matter, questions matter, science matters, experience matters. Women's experience matters. They matter because the symbols function—they do work. This past month, from where we are writing in the United States in the fall of 2015, this became abundantly clear as Pope Francis's words evoked so powerfully the symbols of our shared life in ways that often jarred or surprised us. "Every life is sacred."[2] "It must be said that a true 'right of the environment' does

[1] Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 4.

[2] Pope Francis, Visit to the Joint Session of the United States Congress, Address of the Holy Father, United States Capitol, Washington, DC, Thursday, 24 September 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150924_usa-us-congress.html.

exist."[3] "Gratitude and appreciation [for the family] should prevail over concerns and complaints."[4] This land, to which we belong, is the whole continent—Alaska to the Atacama Desert.[5] Even when the words are all words we know from our traditions the meaning is changed—expanded in the context of the life of the church, which has no political boundaries. How different is it to think that Americans are the citizens of this continent, not just the citizens of the United States? And, what might happen if we allow this idea to sink deep into our imaginations so that it informs how we see ourselves and our neighbors?

Elizabeth Johnson's theology—her power to reveal (to us) how our symbols function to shape us—is likewise an effort that turns the tradition a few degrees on its own axis to reveal meaning, hope, and promise that had been shadowed or veiled. She *turns* St. Irenaeus of Lyons's phrase *Gloria Dei vivens homo* to *Gloria Dei est vivens mulier*, which jars us into realizing that women—especially poor women and women of color—are not valued in our world. Women's lives—*full* lives—are not celebrated and lifted up as loved by God and as revealing of God as consistently or as exuberantly as they should.[6] Johnson's theology develops not as a rejection of the tradition but as a turning and a lifting, a dance with the tradition that raises questions and proposes ways forward in the confidence that the Living One whom Jesus called *Abba* really desires life for all, but also in the sure knowledge that we as a people have failed women. And, in so doing, Johnson has launched us (though not singlehandedly) into a deep, public, critical, and loving conversation that connects how we think about women to how we think about the Triune God of Christian faith and the life to which Christians are called. Over the last several decades, she has similarly

[3] Pope Francis, Meeting with the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, Address of the Holy Father, United Nations Headquarters, New York, Friday, 25 September 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html.

[4] Pope Francis, Meeting with Bishops Taking Part in the World Meeting of Families, Address of the Holy Father, St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Chapel of Saint Martin, Philadelphia, Sunday, 27 September 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150927_usa-vescovi-festa-famiglie.html.

[5] Pope Francis, Visit to the Joint Session of the United States Congress.

[6] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 14–15.

lifted up the tradition around the person of Jesus, the person of Mary his mother, the communion of saints, all creation and its unimaginably ancient story of life, in dialogue with the world as known and the faith Christians believe. Over all of this hovers the mystery of God Who Is! The living one, who is ultimately beyond all names, in and by whose Spirit we live and are transformed.

Most recently, Elizabeth Johnson has turned to the Earth with her book *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*.[7] To some, it may seem that this turn to the Earth, to the cosmos, is a recent addition, an add-on to her more central and urgent work as a feminist theologian, lifting up the experiences of women in light of the central doctrines of Christianity. But the truth is that Johnson has been turning to the cosmos, to the Earth and its creatures, all along. In fact, turning toward women and turning toward the Earth, listening to women and listening to the Earth, valuing women and valuing the Earth are intrinsically related. Speaking in 1993, she said: "I am persuaded of the truth of ecofeminism's insight that analysis of the ecological crisis does not get to the heart of the matter until it sees the connection between the exploitation of the earth and the sexist definition and treatment of women."[8] Even earlier, in her paradigmatic work *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, she tied the goal of feminist religious discourse to the flourishing of women of color in violent situations and the well-being of the Earth. "For me," she wrote in 1992, "the goal of feminist religious discourse pivots in its fullness around the flourishing of poor women of color in violent situations. Not incidentally, securing the well-being of these socially least of women would entail a new configuration of theory and praxis and the genuine transformation of all societies, including the churches, to open up more humane ways of living for all people, *with each other and the earth*."[9] This turning to women *and* turning to the Earth in their needs is precisely the form the Gospel takes in this world today.

The theological work required for such a tremendous task takes place not in a vacuum but in a web of relationships and communities

[7] Elizabeth Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

[8] Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, 1993 Madeleva Lecture (Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 1993), 10.

[9] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 11. Emphasis added.

that includes bishops, scholars, and social movements. Her work was preceded and influenced by ecclesiastical treatises at the episcopal level dealing with environmental degradation and stewardship: from the Appalachian bishops' This Land Is Home to Me and At Home in the Web of Life, to similar work by episcopal conferences in Australia, Malaysia, and Latin America. Work by scholars such as Sallie McFague and Jürgen Moltmann (both contributors here), as well as Catherine Keller and other paradigmatic examples—among them Jame Schaefer, Rita Nakashima Brock, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and many others—laid the groundwork for, inspired growth of, and expressed creatively theological responses to the emerging ecological crisis. Broad social movements, the products of a growing consciousness about the contours of our perilous ecological situation, represent a third strand of this web. Initiatives like the Catholic Climate Covenant evidence the cross-pollination of spiritual and ecological concerns and questions into avenues for activism and social change. This is the context out of which Johnson's ecological work emerges and to which it continues to contribute.

Even as we recognize the varied and intertwining contexts that brought Johnson (and us) to this point, this text represents an attempt to move the conversation forward toward a contemplative ecology, allowing for a retrieval of sacramentality and paving the way for creative encounter: with nonhuman animals, with alternative ethical frameworks, with new theological categories. The essays in this text endeavor to exemplify the ways in which turning to the fate of women engenders deeper conversions in the field of ecological global consciousness, and why that consciousness must inform Catholicism.

In 1996, Elizabeth Johnson was the outgoing president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, which was meeting in San Diego, California, on the theme Toward a Spirited Theology: The Holy Spirit's Challenge to the Theological Disciplines. In her address to the members, she enjoined them to *turn to the heavens and the Earth* and in doing so to reimagine, rediscover, and renew the church's understanding of and relationship to the cosmos, and to do so urgently in the context of growing clarity about how human abuse of the world has created a perilous situation for all the inhabitants of our beautiful blue planet.

It is now nearly twenty years later, and the ecological situation is even more urgent. In this collection of essays, written in honor of Johnson's tireless and inspiring theologizing, an array of Johnson's former students, friends, colleagues, and collaborators were challenged to ply the trade

of theology in service of urgent and necessary turning to the cosmos in theology. What has resulted from that invitation is a collection about conversion that reflects the web of relationality that characterizes all good scholarship. In the end, conversion is a kind of turning—turning toward nonhuman animals, toward the forests, toward the inspired experience of environmental activists, toward the cosmos as a whole. These are turnings that force us to interrogate our theological institutions, our practice of virtue, our experience of vulnerability, our intellectual frameworks, our understanding of suffering and evil, and our categories of inclusion. Many of the chapters echo a central theme of Johnson's work: the centrality of material reality and embodiment that is a focus of ecotheology is a natural extension of faith seeking understanding. Johnson's own turn to ecotheological concerns, as we've noted, is embedded in its own three-part web of relationality and its own patterns of turning.

The book is divided into three sections, each depicting an invitation to "turn." The first group invites readers to turn to the wild(erness), with essays on the ways in which attention to nonhuman animals and reverence for the forest and wilderness more generally usher us toward new frameworks for anthropological and theological conversation. Denis Edwards and Eric Meyer both lift up nonhuman animals, specifically primates, as important sources for ecological-anthropological reflection. Edwards invites nonhuman animals into his recalibration of the *imago Dei*, while for Meyer, nonhuman animals call humanity to an apophatic moment. Colleen Carpenter's and Carol Dempsey's essays both invite the reader to the wilderness. Carpenter elaborates a forest spirituality, in dialogue with great artists who love the forest like Wendell Berry and the Canadian artist Emily Carr. Dempsey opens up ancient Hebrew texts to recall the wilderness as a place of divine (and human) encounter and challenge.

The second section invites a turn to new, more urgent forms of ethical action in order to respond appropriately to the planetary emergency we now face. Michele Saracino suggests embracing genuine vulnerability, while Kevin Ahern proposes a reinterpretation of magnanimity. David Cloutier develops a cosmological paradigm that will enable moral action commensurate with the moral dilemmas of the present. Finally, William French provides two concrete moral frameworks for the ecological task ahead.

The third and final group of essays invites us to turn to something radically new and includes four proposals for reimagining central

theological categories. Erin Lothes Biviano reimagines pneumatology, inspired by the creedal affirmation of the Holy Spirit as Giver of life and drawing on the experiences of religious environmental activists, to reframe a pneumatological trinitarian theology. Lisa Sowle Cahill raises penetrating questions about theodicy and the suffering of the world's creatures in light of evolution and in the context of Johnson's and others' recent work. Jeanette Rodriguez draws together Latina feminist action for justice and ecological concerns in an effort to reimagine a future for the marginalized of the Earth. And Richard W. Miller ponders the theologian's task of thinking the unthinkable as a proper response to planetary emergency.

This collection has two kinds of essays arising out of the fact that Johnson's work reaches across generations, building on earlier work and inviting new work. One group of essays is shorter, more reflective pieces by senior colleagues who have grown to embody the role of elders in our theological community and our world. Sallie McFague, John Haught, Jürgen Moltmann, and Ivone Gebara are all theologians well known for their long and sustained concern that contemporary Christian theology be accountable to the more-than-human world. Kathy Coffey, whose name might be less well known in the academy, is an acclaimed writer and speaker whose work witnesses to the reach of Johnson's thought beyond the academy to people in the pews and in the highways and byways of ordinary Christianity. These elders wrote pieces from the wisdom of their experiences and hope nurtured in their own long labors to turn to the Earth. These elder essays bookend and are woven through the collection.

As a theologian whose work has often been subject to scrutiny, Johnson's tireless response has long been to just keep working. As she has put it so often, you just have to keep doing theology! Her attitude reminds us of that of Peter when Jesus asks him if he wanted to follow another: to whom would we go? This is the answer of a person with a vocation, a person who has been called by name and who knows, through joy and struggle, to what and to whom she is responsible. Beth Johnson is a theologian. This book seeks to honor her theological vocation and the fruit it has borne by bearing witness to the web of relationships of people and thought that Beth's work has challenged, supported, and inspired. In honor of her commitment to advancing theological thought, this work also seeks to extend the field of theology by turning, in a dozen different movements, toward a newly cosmological theology that might help us

to restore, transform, reimagine, and otherwise live in new, sustainable relationship within and with the world. We hope you join the dance!

A Word about This Collection's Collaborators

While Johnson may be most known for her scholarship in the forms of writing and public speaking, her legacy cannot be recounted adequately without deep respect for her work as a teacher and her solidarity in friendship. The contributors to this volume reflect but a dim light on the range of relationships that have both nourished Johnson's work and been nourished by her work. Natalia Imperatori-Lee and Kevin Ahern were her students as undergraduates at Fordham University in the Bronx, while Julia Brumbaugh, Erin Lothes Biviano, and Eric Daryl Meyer were her students in the doctoral program there. Catherine Hilkert, OP, Denis Edwards, and Elizabeth Johnson were graduate students together at Catholic University of America; our publisher, Hans Christoffersen, was her graduate student at CUA when Johnson was on the faculty there; and her friendship with Carol Dempsey, OP, also goes back to those days. Relationships with Jürgen Moltmann, Sallie McFague, John Haught, Lisa Sowle Cahill, and Jeanette Rodriguez all go back decades, with lives and work linked though travel, conferences, theological collaboration, critique, and support rooted in mutual regard and a shared love of theology, the church, and the Holy Mystery hovering over all. Younger scholars who were not "officially" her students bear witness to how Johnson's work mentored—through inspiration, challenge, invitation, and vision—a generation of rising scholars, some of whose work is included here: Colleen Mary Carpenter, David Cloutier, Richard W. Miller, and Michele Saracino. Kathy Coffey, whose essay serves as prologue, is not an academic theologian but a writer. Her essay testifies to the reach of Johnson's theologizing to those Johnson most hoped to reach: the people of God.

Without question, the easiest part of bringing this volume to publication was the willingness with which our contributors agreed to a project that would honor Beth. Even those without direct professor-student or colleague ties to her spoke effusively of her profound influence on their work and development. It is our hope that these essays return, even in some small measure, the generosity Beth has shown to generations of scholars.

ONWARD!!!

Turn to the Heavens and the Earth

Retrieval of the Cosmos in Theology[1]

Elizabeth A. Johnson

Prefatory Note. Giving a presidential address is an awesome task, starting with the choice of topic. In the current ecclesial climate I was tempted to focus on the situation of theology or the role of the theologian, both under duress. However, the words of David Power, this year's John Courtney Murray award winner, came to mind. To a faculty demoralized by the unjust removal of one of our colleagues, he, as chair of [the] department, never ceased repeating, "The best offense is to keep on theologizing." Subvert repression by moving ahead. This is not to say that taking a stand on internal matters is not occasionally necessary. It is. But while theologians have life and breath we must keep on pressing forward, practicing our craft, seeking understanding of the faith for the sake of our own and coming generations. Guided by that wisdom, I have chosen to address the Catholic Theological Society of America on a theological issue that quite literally is coming to be a matter of life or death, namely, the natural world.

Introduction

As the twenty-first century rapidly approaches, there is a vital theme largely absent from the thinking of most North American theologians, namely, the whole world as God's good creation. There are a few notable exceptions among our members, but surveying our work as a whole

[1] Presidential Address, *CTSA Proceedings* 51 (1996): 1–14. Reprinted with permission.

would quickly make this absence clear. This neglect of "the cosmos" by recent decades of mainstream Catholic theology has two deleterious results. It enfeebles theology in its basic task of interpreting the whole of reality in the light of faith, thereby compromising the intellectual integrity of theology. And it blocks what should be theology's powerful contribution to the religious praxis of justice and mercy for the threatened earth, so necessary at this moment of our planet's unprecedented ecological crisis, thereby endangering the moral integrity of theology. In this address I am going to try to persuade you of the following thesis: as theologians of the twenty-first century, we need to complete our recent anthropological turns by turning to the entire interconnected community of life and the network of life-systems in which the human race is embedded, all of which has its own intrinsic value before God. In a word, we need to convert our intelligence to the heavens and the earth.

Remembering and Forgetting the Cosmos

It is instructive to remember the long-standing Catholic heritage that held high the importance of the cosmos in theology, and to examine how and why it got lost.

Theology is potentially the most comprehensive of fields. If there is only one God, and if this God is the Creator of all that exists, then everything is encompassed in the scope of theology's interest. Traditionally this is expressed in the idea that theology deals with three major areas: God, humanity, and world, a metaphysical trinity, so to speak. Nor can these elements be separated, for, as the history of theology makes evident, every understanding of God corresponds to a particular understanding of the natural world and the human.

Early Christian and medieval theologians took this view of things for granted, interpreting the natural world as God's good creation, a revealing pathway to the knowledge of God, and a partner in salvation. It was common for them to say that God has put two books at our disposal, the book of Sacred Scripture and the book of nature; if we learn how to read the book of nature aright, we will hear God's word and be led to knowledge about God's wisdom, power, and love.[2]

[2] For this and what follows, see the study by Max Wilder, *The Theologian and His Universe: Theology and Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Paul Dunphy (New York: Seabury, 1982).

The conscious endeavor to integrate the cosmos into theology reached its zenith in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Inspired by the translation of ancient Greek scientific works along with works by Jewish and Muslim scholars, medieval theologians applied themselves to constructing an all-embracing Christian view of the world, writing innumerable treatises on the universe, on the world, on the picture of the world, on the philosophy of the world, on the nature of things. Their endeavor to interpret the whole world in the light of Christian faith gave vitality to their work and inspired impressive systems in which cosmology, anthropology, and theology of God formed a harmonious unity. Some examples:

- In her summa of Christian doctrine (*Scivias*) Hildegard of Bingen sees the whole universe imbued with the love of Christ, the sun of justice, who shines with "the brilliance of burning charity of such great glory that every creature is illumined by the brightness of this light."[3] In the midst of this marvelous vision stand human beings, "made in a wondrous way with great glory from the dust of the earth, and so intertwined with the strengths of the rest of creation that we can never be separated from them."[4]
- Bonaventure instructs the soul journeying toward God to see the universe as a wonderful work of art in which one recognizes traces of its Maker:

> Whoever is not enlightened by the splendor of created things is blind; whoever is not aroused by the sound of their voice is deaf; whoever does not praise God for all these creatures is mute; whoever after so much evidence does not recognize the First Principle is a fool [*stultus est* = an idiot].[5]

[3] Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist, 1980), 94.

[4] Ibid., 98; adapted for inclusivity.

[5] "Qui igitur tantis rerum creatarum splendoribus non illustratur caecus est; qui tantis clamoribus non evigilat surdus est; qui ex omnibus his effectibus Deum non laudat mutus est; qui ex tantis indiciis primum principium non advertit stultus est." *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, c. 1, no. 15; adapted from *The Mind's Journey to God*, trans. Lawrence Cunningham (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1979).

- Aquinas believes that theologians ought quite consciously to study nature and include a consideration of nature in their work. His own writing is pervaded with a cosmic sense as well as instructive analogies from the natural world, from fire to urine. Indeed, the whole cosmos itself is an astonishing image of God:

> God brought things into being in order that the divine goodness might be communicated to creatures and be represented by them. And because the divine goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, God produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting in one in the representation of divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided. Thus the whole universe together participates in divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better, than any single creature whatever.[6]

Medieval theology brought God, humanity, and the world into an ordered harmony. The resulting synthesis not only shaped art, architecture, liturgy, and poetry, it also remained for centuries a guiding influence in Catholic theology even when its underlying world picture was discredited by scientific advance. And scientific advance there was, as the names of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, and later Darwin, Einstein, Heisenberg, and many others imply. Strange as it may seem in the light of a fifteen-hundred-year-old heritage, after the Reformation neither Catholic nor Protestant theology kept pace with new scientific worldviews. Instead, they focused on God and the self, leaving the world to the side. Why this should have been the case has not been sufficiently studied. One factor frequently cited is the seventeenth-century ecclesiastical censure of Galileo, whose investigations challenged the medieval picture of the universe as geocentric, static, and perfectly ordered. According to John Paul II, speaking on the occasion of Galileo's rehabilitation, at the heart of the conflict was the fact that to church leaders "geocentrism seemed

[6] *Summa theologiae* I, q. 47, a. 1. The first chapters of the *Summa contra gentiles* 2 are even entitled this way: "That the consideration of creatures is useful for instruction of faith" (ch. 2); "That knowledge of the nature of creatures serves to destroy errors concerning God" (ch. 3), wherein it is written that "errors about creatures sometimes lead one astray from the truth of faith" (3.1).

to be part of scriptural teaching itself."[7] Wedded as they were to a literal interpretation of Scripture, they thought that since the Bible assumes the centrality of the earth, this was a doctrine of the faith. To have avoided the conflict "it would have been necessary all at once to overcome habits of thought, and to devise a way of teaching capable of enlightening the people of God." But most of them did not know how to do so.

Under pressure of ecclesiastical censure, Catholic theologians largely ignored the questions arising from a heliocentric and evolutionary world. Theology became estranged from ongoing thought about the universe. Even so, even as the medieval world picture disintegrated and was no longer available as a cosmological framework for Christian doctrine, the spirit of that great synthesis lingered like a ghost in the neoscholastic manuals. Those of us in the Catholic Theological Society of America of a certain age, who first studied theology before the Second Vatican Council, imbibed a sense of the cosmos with our first lessons. The implicit world picture may have been untenable, but at least there was a natural world there worthy of some consideration before God.

Vatican II marked a turning point in the saga of Catholic theology, directing thought with new openness toward dialogue with the modern world and with ecumenical and interreligious partners. Far from putting Catholic thought in touch with Christian theology that had kept pace with scientific advance, however, our first contacts with Protestantism heightened our own absorption with anthropology. For under pressure of the Reformation's great *solas*—Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, Scripture alone—Protestant thought had taken an intensely anthropocentric turn. Revelation discloses a gracious God bent over our sinfulness and justifying us in Christ: theology's vision stays focused on humanity. Furthermore, the Protestant thought we met was grappling with the modern discovery of history. History, interpreted through the lens of the Bible as linear time, was the locus of God's mighty acts. By contrast, nature was the realm of cyclic time where pagan deities were invoked. Nature thus came to be treated as simply a stage on which salvation history was played out. With the outstanding exception of American process thought, cosmology, for all practical purposes, had disappeared as a partner and subject of theology.

[7] Quotations from John Paul II: "Lessons of the Galileo Case," *Origins* 22, no. 22 (12 November 1992): 369–73. For what follows, see also Cardinal Paul Poupard, "Galileo: Report on Papal Commission Findings," ibid., 374–75.

In the decades since the council, Catholic theology has moved rapidly away from neoscholasticism, going through a series of turns: the turn to the subject in transcendental theology; the turn to the subject under threat or defeated, in political theology; the linguistic turn, reintegrating the subject to community; the turn to the nonperson through the praxis of justice in liberation theologies as well as in feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, and Third World women's theologies. In this richness of theology's flourishing, however, it seems to me that something has been lost, namely, even that ghost of outdated cosmology that used to hover in our vision. Today one could go through a whole course of study in college, seminary, or university and never encounter the subject. And yet nature is one of the three main pillars of theology, along with God and humanity. What is needed now, I am convinced, is yet one more turn, a fully inclusive turn to the heavens and the earth, a return to cosmology, in order to restore fullness of vision and get theology back on the track from which it fell off a few hundred years ago. At least two reasons persuade us to make this turn: the intellectual integrity and the moral integrity of theology, one not strictly separable from the other.

Cosmology and the Intellectual Integrity of Theology

Since theology is the study of God and all things in the light of God, shrinking attention to humanity apart from the rest of creation simply does not do justice to theology's intrinsic mission. Even more, ignoring the cosmos has a deleterious effect insofar as it paves the way for theology to retreat to otherworldliness, disparage matter, body, and the earth, and offer interpretations of reality far removed from the way things actually work. We must engage the world. When theology today opens its door to the natural world, it is met with a wondrous array of insights. Medieval cosmology, which saw the world as geocentric, static, and unchanging, hierarchically ordered and centered on humanity, is gone. But gone too is the Enlightenment prejudice that held a mechanistic and deterministic view of nature inimicable in many ways to religious values. Instead, contemporary science is discovering a natural world that is surprisingly dynamic, organic, self-organizing, indeterminate, chancy, boundless, and open to the mystery of reality. There are still many gaps and uncertainties, but enormous discoveries are being made in our day.[8]

[8] Several key works that deal directly with scientific concepts are Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990–1991);

- The world is almost unimaginably *old*: about fifteen billion years ago a single numinous speck exploded in an outpouring of matter and energy, shaping a universe that is still expanding. Five billion years ago an aging, first-generation star exploded, spewing out elements that coalesced to form our sun and its planets, including Earth. (The human race is only recently arrived.)
- The world is almost incomprehensibly *large*: more than 100 billion galaxies, each comprised of 100 billion stars, and no one knows how many moons and planets, all of this visible and audible matter being only a fraction of the matter in the universe. (We humans inhabit a small planet orbiting a medium-sized star toward the edge of one spiral galaxy.)
- The world is almost mind-numbingly *dynamic*: out of the Big Bang, the stars; out of the stardust, the earth; out of the earth, single-celled living creatures; out of the evolutionary life and death of these creatures, human beings with a consciousness and freedom that concentrates the self-transcendence of matter itself. (Human beings are the universe become conscious of itself. We are the cantors of the universe.)
- The world is almost unfathomably *organic*: everything is connected with everything else; nothing conceivable is isolated. In the words of scientist and theologian Arthur Peacocke, "Every atom of iron in our blood would not have been there had it not been produced in some galactic explosion billions of years ago and eventually condensed to form the iron in the crust of the earth from which we have emerged."[9] (We are made of stardust.) We are also biologically interconnected: human genetic structure closely parallels the DNA

Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine, and Human* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Ted Peters, ed., *Cosmos as Creation: Theology and Science in Consonance* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989); John Polkinghorne, *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); and the series edited by Robert Russell et al. and published by the Vatican Observatory (Vatican City) and the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (Berkeley): *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding* (1988), *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (1993), and *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (1995).

[9] Arthur Peacocke, "Theology and Science Today," in Peters, *Cosmos as Creation*, 32.

> of other creatures—bacteria, grasses, bluebirds, horses, the great gray whales. We have all evolved from common ancestors and are kin in the shared history of life.

These and other discoveries of contemporary science coalesce into a picture of the world calling for new interpretations, especially as classical dualisms can no longer be maintained. What, for example, is the proper relationship of spirit and matter if they are in effect the inside and outside of the same phenomena?[10] And—a burning question—what is humanity's place in the great scheme of things? The ancient concept of the hierarchy of being ranks things according to their participation in spirit, from nonorganic to grades of organic life, all under the sway of the Source of Being (from the pebble to the peach to the poodle to the person to the powers and principalities). In this hierarchy, human beings with their rational souls are superior to the natural world, a ranking that easily gives rise to arrogance, one root of the present ecological crisis. Consider for a moment, however, green plants. Predating the human race by millennia, green plants take in carbon dioxide and give off oxygen. Through this process of photosynthesis they create the atmosphere that makes the life of land animals possible. Human beings could not exist without these plants that neither think nor move. They, on the other hand, get along fine without us. Wherein, then, lies superiority?[11] In an interdependent system, no part is intrinsically higher or lower. Yes, more complex life represents critical evolutionary breakthrough, but not such as to remove humanity from essential dependence on previously evolved creatures. The challenge is to redesign the hierarchy of being into a circle of the community of life. With a kind of species humility,

[10] See the insightful essay of Karl Rahner, "The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, trans. Karl and Boniface Kruger (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 153–77. The works of Teilhard de Chardin are prophetic in this respect: cf. *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) and *Hymn of the Universe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

[11] This example is taken from Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 67. This scholar has contributed early, insightfully, and voluminously to ecological theology: see her *New Woman, New Earth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), chap. 8; *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), chaps. 3, 9, 10, and postscript; and *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992).

we need to reimagine systematically the uniqueness of being human in the context of our profound kinship with the rest of nature.

In addition to prodding us to rethink basic categories, the new cosmology also offers a new framework within which to consider typical theological questions.[12] Each of our subspecialties is profoundly affected. In such an old, vast, dynamic, and organic world, how and for what reasons does one come to belief in God (foundational theology or apologetics)? What wisdom about the world can be found in biblical and historical authors and the writings of the world's other religious traditions? What does the book of nature in our day teach us about the mystery of God, the Creator of this magnificence, who continues to work creatively within its open and unpredictable systems? How to interpret the irreversible entrance of God into precisely this world through the incarnation of divine Wisdom and the transformation of this flesh in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? How to understand that the love revealed in Jesus' healings and feeding and poured out on the cross is the very same "Love that moves the sun and the other stars,"[13] so that Dante's vision is no pious lyricism but a theological truth? How to interpret the Spirit of the baptismal font as none other than the very Giver of Life to all the creatures of the rain forest (another undeveloped aspect of pneumatology to which this convention's theme has been drawing our attention)? Whence evil in such a self-organizing universe, and how does sin gain a foothold? Why suffering? How to preach salvation as healing and rescue for the whole world rather than an a-cosmic relation to God? How to let go of contempt for matter, the

[12] It is good to report that the work has already begun. See, e.g., university symposiums: David Burrell, ed., *God and Creation: An Ecumenical Symposium* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); and Kevin Irwin, ed., *Preserving the Creation: Environmental Theology and Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994); pivotal essays: David Tracy, "Cosmology and Christian Hope," in his O*n Naming the Present* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 73–81, and Michael Himes and Kenneth Himes, "Creation and an Environmental Ethic," in their *Fullness of Faith* (New York: Paulist, 1993), 104–24; and book-length treatments: John Haught, *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose* (New York: Paulist, 1993); Tony Kelly, *An Expanding Theology: Faith in a World of Connections* (Newtown, Australia: E. J. Dwyer, 1993)—a little summa; and Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995).

[13] Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Dorothy Sayers and Barbara Reynolds (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1962), canto 33, line 145.

body and its sexuality, and revalue them as good and blessed? How to interpret human beings as primarily "earthlings" rather than tourists or aliens whose true home is elsewhere?[14] How to conceive of the church, its mission and structures, in an evolving universe? How to recognize the sacraments as symbols of divine graciousness in a universe which is itself a sacrament? How to hope for the eschatological redemption of the whole material universe, even now groaning? What paths of spirituality does the new cosmology suggest? Not least, how is moral decision making affected? In the classic synthesis, there is a natural order in the world established by God and knowable by the human mind. To act morally or "in accord with natural law" is to transpose the order in the cosmos into human conduct, doing or avoiding acts according to their coherence with that order. How is this pattern of thought affected by the realization that the laws of nature are themselves not eternal principles but only approximations read off from regularities, and that their working is shot through with chance and indeterminacy? Bringing cosmology into view, I am suggesting, shifts the axis of all theological questions, setting an agenda for years to come. Notice that one does not have to deal with the cosmos directly; rather, it provides both framework and substantive insights useful for *fides quaerens intellectum*. The intellectual integrity of theology, as public discourse of a North American community responsible to articulate faith in a global society, requires vigorous response to this intellectual challenge.

Cosmology and the Moral Integrity of Theology

Besides an intellectual reason for theology's turn to the heavens and the earth, there is a compelling moral reason as well. In our day the human race is inflicting devastation on the life-systems and other living species of our home planet, havoc that has reached crisis proportions and even in some places ecological collapse. Due to the unceasing demands of consumerist economies on the one hand and burgeoning population on the other, we are exploiting earth's resources without regard for long-term sustainability.

[14] This is the expression of Sallie McFague, "An Earthly Theological Agenda," in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, ed. Carol Adams (New York: Continuum, 1993), 84–98.

This assault on the earth results now in damage to the systems that sustain life: holes in the ozone layer; clear-cut forests; drained wetlands; denuded grasslands and soils; polluted air, rivers, and coastal waters; poisoned oceans; disrupted habitats; and hovering over all the threat of nuclear conflagration and the reality of nuclear waste. The wide-scale destruction of ecosystems has as its flip side the extinction of species with a consequent loss of earth's biodiversity. By a conservative estimate, in the last quarter of the twentieth century (1975–2000), 20 percent of all living species will have become extinct. We are living in a time of a great dying off. Life forms that have taken millions of years to evolve, magnificent animals and intricate plants, are disappearing forever, due to human actions. Their perishing sends an early warning signal of the death of the planet itself as a dwelling place for life. In the blunt language of the World Council of Churches Canberra assembly, "The stark sign of our times is a planet in peril at our hands."[15]

This ongoing destruction of God's good earth, when perceived through the lens of theology, bears the mark of deep sinfulness.[16] Through greed, self-interest, and injustice, human beings are violently bringing disfigurement and death to this living, evolving planet which ultimately comes from the creative hands of God who looks upon it as "very good" (Gen 1:31). Ecocide, biocide, geocide—these new terms attempt to name the killing of ecosystems and species that are meant to reflect the glory of God but instead end up broken or extinct. One of the "books" that teaches about God is being ruined, and this is a matter for theological concern, having even the character of a moral imperative.

In light of the devastation, the turn to the heavens and the earth bears the marks of genuine conversion of mind and heart, with repentance for the lack of love and the violence visited on the living planet. As we turn, we will be looking for thought patterns that will transform our species-centeredness and enable us to grant not just instrumental

[15] "Giver of Life—Sustain Your Creation," in *Signs of the Spirit*, official report of the WCC's seventh assembly in Canberra, ed. Michael Kinnamon (Geneva: WCC, 1991), 55.

[16] See Sallie McFague's shrewd analysis of ecological sin in her *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress Press, 1993), 112–29; her earlier work, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), is filled with data about the ecological crisis and offers a rethinking of God in its light.

worth but intrinsic value to the natural world. This is a condition for the possibility of extending vigorous moral consideration to the whole earth, now under threat.[17] If nature with its own inherent value before God be the new poor, then our compassion is called into play. Solidarity with victims, option for the poor, and action on behalf of justice widen out from human beings to embrace life-systems and other species to ensure vibrant communion in life for all.

Moral reflection about the natural world under threat becomes more complex when we take into consideration the organic links that exist between exploitation of the earth and injustice among human beings themselves. The voices of the poor and of women bring to light the fact that structures of social domination are chief among the ways that abuse of the earth is accomplished. Attending to these voices prevents retrieval of the cosmos from being tagged as the interest of only a First World, male, academic elite.

The Poor

Economic poverty coincides with ecological poverty, for the poor suffer disproportionately from environmental destruction.[18] In so-called Third World countries, the onset of development through capitalism

[17] This intrinsic value is well attested in biblical theologies. God covenants with the earth as well as with humans; prophets invoke judgment over all that destroys life; Wisdom's playful delight in the natural world is not dependent on human participation. As oppressed people cry out to God, so too the earth can groan, lament, and shout out; conversely, rejoicing clothes the hills, the desert blossoms, the meadows and valleys sing with gladness. See Richard Clifford, "The Bible and the Environment," in Irwin, *Preserving the Creation*, 1–26.

[18] See David Hallman, ed., *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Geneva: WCC; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994); Leonardo Boff and Virgilio Elizondo, eds., *Ecology and Poverty*, *Concilium* 5 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), esp. Eduardo Gudynas, "Ecology from the Viewpoint of the Poor," 106–14; Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995); Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre, eds., *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1995), esp. H. Paul Santmire, "Ecology, Justice, and Theology: Beyond the Preliminary Skirmishes," 56–62, and Vandana Shiva, "Development, Ecology, and Women," 161–71; and Vitor Westhelle, "Creation Motifs in the Search for a Vital Space: A Latin American Perspective," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Susan Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 128–40.

brings deforestation, soil erosion, and polluted waters, which in turn lead to the disruption of local cycles of nature and the sustenance economies on which most poor people depend. Sheer human misery results. Again, plantation farming of commodity crops for export not only destroys biodiversity but also creates wealth for a few from the backbreaking labor of a class of poor people. Correlatively, lack of land reform pushes dispossessed rural peoples to the edges of cultivated land where, in order to stay alive, they practice slash-and-burn agriculture, in the process destroying pristine habitat, killing rare animals, and displacing indigenous peoples. To give a North American example, US companies export work to factories across the Mexican border (*maquiladores*) that cheaply employ thousands of young, rural women to make high-quality consumer goods for export while they live in unhealthy squalor in an environment spoiled by toxic waste.

In a global perspective, these conditions result from an economic system driven by profit whose inner logic makes it prey without ceasing on nature's resources and seek cheap labor to turn those resources into consumer products. The beneficiaries are the wealthy classes and nations, including ourselves, who consume without ceasing a disproportionate amount of the earth's resources not out of need to stay alive but out of need to be pleasured and entertained. Even in these wealthy countries, ecological injustice runs through the social fabric. The economically well-off, for example, can choose to live amid acres of green, while poor people are housed near factories, refineries, or waste processing plants that heavily pollute the environment; birth defects, general ill health, and disease result. The bitterness of this experience is exacerbated by racial prejudice as environmental racism pressures people of color to dwell in these neighborhoods. In sum, social injustice has an ecological face: ravaging of people and of the land go hand in hand. To be truly effective, therefore, the turn to the cosmos in theology needs to include commitment to a more just social order within the wider struggle for life as a whole, for healthy ecosystems where all living creatures can flourish.

Women

Exploitation of the earth also coincides with the subordination of women within the system of patriarchy. Female symbolism for nature generally pervades human thought, arising from the fact that women

are the lifegivers to every human child as the earth itself, Mother Earth, brings forth fruits. Feminist scholarship today points out how classical Christian theology has consistently used this symbolic affinity to interpret both women and the natural world in terms of hierarchical dualism, separating them from and subordinating them to the men they bring forth and sustain. While granted their own goodness before God, both women and nature are identified with matter, potency, and body more than with spirit, act, and mind. They are assigned mainly instrumental value in this world and excluded from direct contact with the sphere of the sacred, which is construed in analogy with transcendent male consciousness beyond the realm of coming to be and passing away. Women whose bodies mediate physical existence to humanity thus become the oldest symbol of the connection between social domination and the domination of nature.[19]

While the construals of Greek philosophy that undergird traditional subordinationist theologies may be superseded by other philosophies, the mentality that sees nature as something to be dominated continues to draw on the imagery and attitudes of men's domination of women. We speak of "the rape of the earth," revealing the extent to which exploitation of nature is identified with violent sexual conquest of women, and of "virgin forest," as yet untouched by man but awaiting his exploration and conquest. These and other linguistic metaphors point to the reality that ruling man's hierarchy over women extends also to nature, who is meant for his service while he, in his nobility, has a duty to control and a right to use her.

The contribution of women from cultural positions other than white feminists is instructive here. For example, womanist theologian Delores Williams makes a telling connection between the violation of nature and the practice of breeding black women under slavery, both defilements leading to exhaustion of the body and depletion of the spirit created by God.[20] Describing the Chipko Movement to protect local trees in

[19] "In addition to the writings of Ruether and McFague, see Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism, and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress Press, 1991); Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (New York: Paulist, 1993); Adams, *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*; and MacKinnon and McIntyre, *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*.

[20] Delores Williams, "Sin, Nature, and Black Women's Bodies," in Adams, *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, 24–29; see also Shamara Shantu Riley, "Ecology Is a

India and the Green Belt Movement for reforestation in Kenya, both led largely by women, Asian theologian Aruna Gnanadason analyzes how the women are affirming the life of their own bodies in the process.[21] Indeed, in our day, women's bodily self-confidence, women's psychological and spiritual self-confidence, flows against the tide of ecological collapse but meets mighty opposition in the process.

In sum, sexism too has an ecological face, and the devastating consequences of patriarchal dualism cannot be fully addressed until the system is faced as a whole. To be truly effective, therefore, the turn to the cosmos in theology needs to cut through the knot of misogynist prejudice in our systematic concepts, shifting from dualistic, hierarchical, and atomistic categories to holistic, communal, and relational ones.

The argument of this section has been that the moral integrity of theology demands that it extend its concern to embrace the great family of earth as a supreme value, now under threat. The vision motivating such theology is that of a flourishing humanity on a thriving earth, both together a sacrament of the glory of God.

Ellery and Participation

Having scanned the history of the cosmological theme in theology and having argued for its retrieval on the grounds of theology's intellectual and moral integrity, I would like to engage you in a simple thought experiment, one that may whet your appetite for the work that lies ahead. Let us juxtapose a goldfish with Aquinas's notion of participation and ask what might result if theology interpreted the former in the light of the latter.

We begin with nature writer Annie Dillard's description of her goldfish Ellery:

> This Ellery cost me twenty-five cents. He is a deep red-orange, darker than most goldfish. He steers short distances mainly with his slender red lateral fins; they seem to provide impetus for going

---

Sistah's Issue Too," in MacKinnon and McIntyre, *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, 214–29.

[21] Aruna Gnanadason, "Towards a Feminist Eco-Theology for India," in *A Reader in Feminist Theology*, ed. Prasanna Kumari (Madras, India: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, 1993), 95–105.

> backward, up, or down. . . . He can extend his mouth, so it looks like a length of pipe; he can shift the angle of his eyes in his head [to] look before and behind himself, instead of simply out to his side. His belly, what there is of it, is white . . . and a patch of this white extends up his sides . . . as though all his [upper] brightness were sunburn.
>
> For this creature, as I said, I paid twenty-five cents. I had never bought an animal before. It was very simple; I went to a store in Roanoke called "Wet Pets"; I handed the man a quarter, and he handed me a knotted plastic bag bouncing with water in which a green plant floated and the goldfish swam. This fish, two bits' worth, has a coiled gut, a spine radiating fine bones, and a brain. Just before I sprinkle his food flakes into his bowl, I rap three times on the bowl's edge; now he is conditioned, and swims to the surface when I rap. And, he has a heart.[22]

As Sallie McFague comments, "the juxtaposition in this passage of twenty-five cents with the elaborateness, cleverness, and sheer glory of this tiny bit of matter named Ellery is frankly unnerving. For the intricacy of this little creature calls forth wonder, and suddenly we see that it is priceless."[23] What would be an appropriate theological interpretation of Ellery? I suggest that Aquinas's notion of participation is a resource with great and largely untapped potential to help answer that question.

According to Aquinas, all creatures exist by participation in divine being.[24] This is an awesome concept, suggesting an intrinsic, ongoing relationship with the very wellspring of being, with the sheer livingness of the living God who in overflowing graciousness quickens all things. Exemplifying the catholic imagination at work, Aquinas works with a fine analogy to explain this.[25] God's presence among creatures awakens them to life the way fire ignites what it brushes against. We know that fire is present wherever something catches on fire. Just so, everything that exists does so by participation in the fire of divine being. Everything

[22] Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek: A Mystical Excursion into the Natural World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 124.

[23] McFague, *The Body of God*, 210. I am indebted to this author for her discovery and use of this passage.

[24] For what follows, see Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, questions 4 (a. 3), 8, 13, 15 (a. 2), 18, 44, 45 (a. 7), and 104; and *Summa contra gentiles* 3, chs. 17-21, 65-70.

[25] *ST* I, q. 8, a. 1, 2, 3; and *SCG* 3.66, par. 7.

that acts is energized by participation in divine act. Everything that brings something else into being does so by sharing in divine creative power. Every act of resistance to the history of radical suffering is fueled by the inexhaustible source of new being. Conversely, thanks to the relation of participation, we can affirm of God in a surpassing and originating sense all the vitality, radical energy, spontaneity, and charm encountered in the world. In turn, we can see that creatures themselves in some way resemble God.

Does Ellery exist by participation in divine being? Is this glorious little fish in some way an image of God? Is he a word in the book of nature that reveals knowledge of God? Is God intimately present to this goldfish preserving him in existence at every moment? Does he have his own intrinsic value which we are called upon to respect? If so—and I hope you are answering "Yes" to these questions—then we can ill afford to neglect him. Including Ellery, and by extension the whole universe, in theological reflection is of critical importance.

Conclusion

This address has been seeking to persuade you that theology needs to complete the many recent worthy turns to the subject with a turn to the heavens and the earth. Whatever our subdisciplines, we need to develop theology with a tangible and comprehensive ecological dimension. I am not suggesting that we just think through a new theology of creation, but that cosmology be a framework within which all theological topics be rethought and a substantive partner in theological interpretation. There is hard work ahead. We need to appreciate all over again that the whole universe is a sacrament, vivified by the presence of the Creator Spirit. We need to realize that its destruction is tantamount to a sacrilege. And we need to fathom that human beings are part of the mystery and magnificence of this universe, not lords of the manor but partners with God in helping creation to grow and prosper.

Recovering the cosmocentric power of the fuller Christian tradition puts us in line with our ancient and medieval forebears and fosters the intellectual and moral integrity of theology. Not doing so would be to make our theologizing increasingly irrelevant. It would also be to fail in responsibility to our profession, to the Church, and to generations yet unborn, human and nonhuman species alike. Doing so sets theology off on a great intellectual adventure, one where both wisdom and

prophecy will intertwine on the way to a new theological synthesis and praxis. This, friends and colleagues, is a monumental challenge as the Catholic Theological Society of America begins its second half-century of Catholic talk.[26]

[26] See Peter Steinfels, "Fifty Years of Catholic Talk," *New York Times* (20 June 1995), A12, on the fiftieth-anniversary convention.

Part 1

Turning

To the Wild(erness)

Chapter 1

Turn to the Earth

Some Reflections on Elizabeth Johnson's Contributions

Sallie McFague

Elizabeth Johnson and I, as they say, "go back a long way." I have admired her work for many years and cherished her friendship just as much. She is, I believe, one of the most important theological voices of our generation, and I am honored to write a few words about her distinctive contributions. There are many, but I will focus on just one, which is epitomized in our mutual love for a little goldfish named Ellery and its implications for a theological response to global climate change. In Beth's presidential address in 1996 for the Catholic Theological Society of America, titled "Turn to the Heavens and the Earth: Retrieval of the Cosmos in Theology," she called on all theologians not merely to "think through a new theology of creation" but to reframe all theological topics from a cosmological perspective. She notes how demanding this task will be, for "we need to appreciate all over again that the whole universe is a sacrament, vivified by the presence of the Creator Spirit." What a challenge! And, believe it or not, she insists that we include Ellery the goldfish. In fact, Ellery becomes the main example of Aquinas's notion that all creatures exist through their participation in the divine being. What an awesome assignment for

a little goldfish that Annie Dillard has told us cost "twenty-five cents" in a store called Wet Pets in Roanoke, Virginia. As Dillard writes, "This fish, two bits' worth, has a coiled gut, a spine radiating fine bones, and a brain. Just before I sprinkle his food flakes into his bowl, I rap three times on the bowl's edge; now he is conditioned, and swims to the surface when I rap. And, he has a heart."[1]

Beth and I both see Ellery as an example of Aquinas's notion of participation in God. Ellery stands for what is true of every creature, no matter how humble—"its ongoing relationship with the very well-spring of being, with the sheer livingness of the living God who in overflowing graciousness quickens all things." If we can see Ellery as "within" God, then we will also see other events as within God, as Beth tells us: "every act of resistance to the history of radical suffering" as well as "all the vitality, radical energy, spontaneity, and charm encountered in the world." In other words, does this include such events as climate change and financial inequality? Does the suffering as well as the insight and energy needed to tackle such matters also participate somehow in God? I think Beth is telling us that it does.

From the microscopic to the macroscopic, *everything* participates, both in its joys and sufferings, *within* God. By using Ellery the goldfish as the example of the most important direction for theology in the twenty-first century, Beth is telling us that one thing needful is for us *to wake up*. She is telling us to see the whole world "within God's hands," every scrap of it. At the heart of this call to theologians is *a new way to see the world*. We are called to wake up to both the glory and the horror of life on planet Earth, the glory of the intricacy, beauty, and cleverness of Ellery *and* the horror of the brief lives of suffering that most creatures undergo. Beth is calling us to *wake up and stay aware* that we live daily and in all ways and at all levels in a world that is awesome and wonderful beyond expression and *also* a world that is more gruesome, selfish, depressing, and mean-spirited beyond what we can endure. But all of this world, the cosmos with its joys and sufferings, is "within God's hands," participating in the divine being both to gain insight and energy for its beauty, life, and love *and* to endure its most despicable human atrocities.

[1] Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek: A Mystical Excursion into the Natural World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 124.

As we step further into the twenty-first century, a time notable so far for challenging us with fearful climate change and gross financial inequality, we realize that in order to bear both its beauty and its terrors, we will need this new way of seeing, the *wide awake aware gaze* that encourages us to see each and every creature and event as participating in God. Everything lives within God, not in a general or generic way, but in its own most particular and distinctive manner and ways. Ellery, as Dillard tells us, is not any old goldfish but a *particular* one with unique features: "He is a deep red-orange, darker than most goldfish. He steers short distances mainly with his slender red lateral fins; they seem to provide impetus for going backward, up, or down. . . . He can extend his mouth, so it looks like a length of pipe; he can shift the angle of his eyes in his head [to] look before and behind himself, instead of simply out to his side. His belly, what there is of it, is white . . . and a patch of white extends up his sides . . . as though all his [upper] brightness were sunburn."[2] As we read this seemingly endless passage describing in detail the peculiarities of this particular goldfish, we may wonder, "Do we really need to know *so much* about one measly goldfish?" Apparently, we do, since Aquinas's understanding of participation is not some general mushy stew but the acknowledgment and appreciation for each and every particular creature, object, and event in the cosmos. So, glory to God for difference, diversity, and peculiarity! Apparently, we are to wake up to and love marvelous, messy planet Earth in all the glorious detail of its most humble members.

So, what an assignment Beth has given the upcoming generation of theologians! We do not know what this new century will bring us. Many of us fear the worst. The Anthropocene Era, the human era, is characterized by the end of human innocence and ignorance: *we know that we know*. We know who we are in the scheme of things (as Beth's book on evolution illustrates), and we know that we are responsible for the planetary mess at both ecological and financial levels. We may not want to wake up and stay aware, but it is our fate as well as the most important challenge facing us. Beth reminds that "every creature and *event*" participates in God; hence, we know that we must also include such "events" as climate change and financial inequality. It is not that God causes such events, but if Ellery is within God then so are these

[2] Ibid.

results of our actions. As we tackle the most difficult challenges that human beings have ever faced, we need to recall that "Retrieval of the Cosmos" for theology includes *everything*, even such monstrous, enigmatic, complex, and daunting events. We do not face these events alone—hallelujah!