

CATHERINE KELLER

Drew University

THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE¹

Carl Raschke: So, I want to welcome Catherine Keller. It's great to see you again. I think it was back in 2004 at a conference with Jack Caputo that we met for the first time over lunch. We've run into each other different times I remember we ran into each other in Sweden unexpectedly at Lund University. I probably don't have to read your bio but I'll just go through it here.

So, Catherine Keller practices theology as a relation between ancient hints of ultimacy and current matters of urgency. She is the George T. Cobb Professor of constructive theology in the theological school and graduate division of religion of Drew University. She teaches courses in process, political, and ecological theology. Within and beyond Christian conservatism, she has all along mobilized the transdisciplinary potential feminist, philosophical, and pluralist intersection with religion.

Her most recent books invite at once contemplative and social embodiments of the entangled difference. I'll just read off a number of the books she's written which are really provocative: *Facing Apocalypse: Climate, Democracy, and Other Last Chances*, says it is forthcoming in 2021 but it's already out. *Political Theology of the Earth*, which in my mind really crystallized a lot of these issues here. *Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for a New Public*, *Intercarnations: On the Possibility of Theology*, and *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*, 2014. Keller's other books include *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process*, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys*, *Face of the Deep* where I first became familiar with her work. *A Theology of Becoming*, and *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World*. I loved it when we bring eschatology into academic discussions. I get all jazzed and excited. She has one more book, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self*. Well, Catherine, and let me just say... Catherine, are you here, did we lose you?

¹ The following is a transcript of the keynote lecture given by Drew University professor and theologian at an online conference in October 2023 entitled "The Religious Roots of Environmental Justice" sponsored by the *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* in partnership with the University of Denver. Selected articles from the proceedings of the conference will be published in *JCRT* in a later issue in 2024. The moderator for the conference was Carl Raschke, Professor of Philosophy of Religion at the University of Denver and Senior Editor for *JCRT*. Other interlocutors in the transcript were members of the audience.

Catherine Keller: Well, thank you Carl, and by the way if you happen to be in Lund this spring that university is bringing me over for a couple of months. But also, I want to say I'm sorry not to be able to hear most of your presentations. I'm caught between some traveling engagements and multiple commitments but I'm very grateful to be part of this crucial conversation. Grateful to its crucial planners. This conversation is on the religious roots of environmental justice and I hope we have a cozy conversation since there aren't too many of us. So please if you have little questions just jot them off to the side and we'll probably have time for them. Don't feel you have to always capture the core of things in a question. I'm glad for prepared questions. I have not prepared answers but that just gets us to a deeper level of thinking quickly in our conversation. So, roots of environmental justice, I'll be thinking about that in terms of both roots and branching. This talk is called "Earth Matters: Generation, motivation, and Eco-Civilization." I'm going to read this...

Catherine Keller: Two planets meet and the first one asks, "how are you doing?" "Not so well," The second answer "I've got is the Homo sapiens." "Don't worry," the other replied, "I had the same. That won't last long."

Yeah. So maybe it's in bad taste to talk about our species approaching extinction. But you can see why the earth might chuckle. On the other hand, if we do not last long due to Eco-side, it's actually going to be considerably worse for the planet than well if we get our act together. Together with each other and with the earth and evolve onward for a good while. Now these are two sides of a really big "if" and as the paleontologist, and chief editor of *Scientific American*, Henry Gee puts it: "We could last for millions of years or we could drop down next week." So, I don't want to be estimating today how long we might or might not last, but to meditate on the matter.

The earth mattering of that big double-sided "If." In the meantime, as the earth suffers, Homo Sapiens isn't a bad name for the disease. Well, except for the misimplication of wisdom in the name. But of course, we do need to be a bit more specific. We, the species, are not all to blame. Not nearly, nor do we all, or will we all suffer equally the effects of global warming. No more than we all suffer equally now the injustices of the dominant order. Nonetheless, there is no avoiding thinking species-wide, and hence truly planetary terms about the causes and the effects of this worsening condition including the planetary inequalities.

Thinking about our species always entails analysis of power. Political and economic, gross inequality seems to be a part of what it is to be Homo Sapiens, at least in the terms, and by now the really long terms of our civilization. So, the chance of

an alternative, an ecological civilization, does mean, first of all, to face those powers. Those who do the most to cause the climate catastrophe will do as little as possible to fix it. It all comes down to you and to me, and those we can influence multiplied by millions. Not as mere individuals, but as participants in multiple systems, networks, races, and nations.

That means, first of all, making and keeping conscious that the earth matters and how it matters as more than the background of our mattering lives. More than the background of those issues that preoccupy us. Sometimes so burning these issues like the war that's just unbearably breaking out in the Middle East. But this is matter, this Earth, that matters as the active ground of what we are precisely not in the sense of a boringly mindless matter. A matter at base inert, lifeless, flat stuff. That's the materialism of the modern world. Since Newton and that old, modern materialism has progressed triumphantly into the postmodern capitalist world as the stuff to be consumed.

Now we are being offered the new materialism as a critique of that old version. I'm not crazy about that name given the ever-new forms of the old materialism ever newly commodified. I think of the alternative more as new materialization than is materialism per se. I want to evoke the active materializing, not just the passive material but the so-called new materialism is working constructively with the ecological meaning of matter. A sense of matter, not as substance or stuff but as process. The active process of materialization of becoming material. Getting embodied moment by moment in an elemental inseparability from all the other embodiments, making up our world in a materialization of that subtle energy that is matter multiplied, not just by the speed of light but the speed of light multiplied by itself, unfathomable. It is important to meditate on that occasionally. That energy that makes us all up. Energy carries the materialization, anything but static, and carries it not as progress but as the process in its endless events of materialization. It's relational events of moment to moment becoming, which is what a philosophy of process matter, comes down to.

So, materialization is also the opposite of abstraction, to pull away from. Materialization pulls energy into embodiment. It actualizes possibilities that would otherwise remain abstract. Of course, abstractions themselves aren't the problem. The problem is losing the sense of the moment-to-moment concreteness of materialization. That loss is what the process philosopher Whitehead called the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." It means mistaking an abstraction for concrete materialization. Like mistaking the abstract quantities of profit for the concreteness of the quality of embodied life. This is what process theologian and

my doctoral advisor, John Cobb, who I just was visiting up to 24 hours ago, who's about to turn ninety-nine. It's what John Cobb demonstrated in the monumental book co-authored with economist, Herman Daley, in 1989, called *For The Common Good: Redirecting The Economy Toward Community Environment And A Sustainable Future*.

That fallacy of misplaced concreteness lets the old materialism keep putting our materiality in the background where it can be endlessly quantified and commodified. Then we dissociate from all the possibilities for the future that will materialize for better or worse. From the present Earth possibilities materializing in your lives right now that you in part select and do so according to what matters to you. Matters in the sense of having value even what might count for you as ultimate value. The matter of ultimate concern as Paul Tillich put it, "to lend a bit more theology into the discussion." What matters ultimately you can call it God. You can call it rightness, spirit, truth, goodness, love, justice. The shared life of the Earth, of the universe. A mattering that the Abrahamic religions do name God. That is what you that mattering whatever you name, it is what you make matter for the future of your planet. What you materialize. I'm meditating with you today on how that Earth matters in terms of generation, motivation, and eco-civilization.

So first, when I talk about your materializing future, not just ours, I want to pause and take into account the significant generational differences among us. Some of you are very young from my perspective. For you, the future of climate change is no abstraction. It is your future. You will personally experience whether or not we reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Net zero is what the International Energy Agency says we must reach in order to stay within the average 1.5 degrees centigrade of warming. Within the limit of a degree and a half that might, just might, prevent the extreme and irreversible climate effects that kick in with 2 degrees centigrade. Where are we now? 1.15 degrees centigrade.

This May, the World Meteorological Organization issued a report that projected a significant likelihood, a 66% likelihood, that the world would exceed the 1.5°C threshold in the next 4 years. This breach would be driven by human-induced climate change, combined with a warming "El Nino," a cyclical weather phenomenon that temporarily heats up ocean regions and pushes global temperatures even higher. Though it's not in itself, then permanent.

Yeah, all these facts, not what I went into theology to study, facts. But, as the Pope put it, in the brand-new climate encyclical *Laudate Daum*. In recent years some have chosen to deride these facts. They bring up allegedly solid scientific data

like the fact that the planet has always had and will all and will have periods of cooling and warming. They forget to mention another relevant datum. What we are presently experiencing is an unusual acceleration of warming at such a speed that it will only take one generation, not centuries or millennia, in order to verify it. Only one generation.

Generationally speaking, the younger you are, the more reason you have actually to be angry. You will inherit this precarious future which you did not cause. Those who have done the least to cause global warming, generationally as well as ethnically, racially, and economically will be hit hardest by it.

Anger does not need to get stuck in blame, of course, or to burst out counterproductively. But anger helps to hold responsible. Able to respond to oneself, and also those older, with more power, and getting in touch with the anger helps to cut through the excuses in its responsible forms. It can intensify transgenerational solidarity. In solidarity, those generational differences can become generative.

Both words are, of course, related to the word “genesis,” becoming. The ancient Hebrew myth names the sacredness of the becoming of the whole creation. The Earth, and all the Earthlings, are not cosmic accidents. They materialized in this story from an ultimate mattering. Genesis also quickly narrates the greed, the arrogance, that gets going early on in our species. That transgenerational sin seems to be coming to a head in the threat against the good Earth and all other Earthlings altogether very good. Genesis itself, the ongoing becoming of our world, is at stake. Not of the universe or the multiverse, but of our precious world, our little mattering bit of it.

In the next generation, the earth's habitat will continue to degenerate, or it will be regenerated through our collaboration with what matters and for some of us, with what matters ultimately. So eco-theology in its Abrahamic modes brings in such Biblical metaphors. Despite their flaws, such as the misreadability of the dominion, we keep using Biblical texts because, despite the problems. They can help to motivate the broader solidarities that are needed. They can influence the public shaped by those texts and misshaped by systemic misreadings of them.

My religion, a form of Christianity, has been, or, let me just say, Christianity, for now, has been a major source of our civilization's denigration and exploitation of matter. Even if the material bodies of other humans. Those considered to be not quite as human because of their religion, or their class, or their race, or their gender, or their sexuality. A certain kind of otherworldly Christianity, which thinks itself anti-materialistic, quietly supports that old materialism, and with the white

materiality, the white religious right, not so quietly. Its other world sanctifies our species, abstractions, and extractions from this world. In the interest of higher things, that otherworldliness de-motivates care for the matter of the earth.

So, I always need to discuss the Christian, not just generally religious roots of anti-environmentalism. But yes, also, of environmentalism. For indeed there have arisen deep traditions of Christian ecology. These traditions draw both on the ancient traditions, particularly in their prophetic social critical forms, and on cutting-edge science. So, John Cobb already wrote a book called, *Is It Too Late?* In 1971, just before I went to study with him. Speaking of different generations, so long as he stays alive, I feel young.

That was the first book by a single author on the ethics and theology of the looming ecological crisis. He recently updated it for its fiftieth anniversary. It was ahead of most ecological work in any discipline. His answer to his titular question, "is it too late?" Wasn't it a simple yes or no, nor is it now. Though it has slid on the spectrum from yes, towards no.

It was process theology that drew me into doctoral work with him. But it was the critique of the standard paternal God that had hooked me as a young feminist. That the process deity takes the place of the old father, God and his presumed omnipotence was what first broke through to me. process theology was ripe for a feminist rendition. It already sees that God cannot be. It already saw before it got in touch with feminism that God cannot be both all controlling and good for things would just not be in the mess that they're in. It offers a strong alternative to God, the patriarch. The controller who rewards and punishes or God, the puppeteer, who is in control of everything. The process God does not control but lures. Such a God can't intervene to save us from ourselves. It's not in that God's nature. The process God calls to us to make the needed transformations of ourselves and of our collective world before it is too late.

But eco theology is, of course, much broader than process theology. I loved hearing from Elijah Pruitt Davis this morning about Sister Paula and the global Ecumenical body. The World Council of Churches has, since the 1970s helped develop the concept of sustainable communities. And then, at the 1982 Vancouver meeting of the World Council of Churches, the phrase, "the integrity of creation," was coined as the Church's encompassing commitment to the values of a just participatory society. The phrase signifies that the creation does not exist just as a means for human ends. It has, every bit of it has, its own integrity.

Yeah, 1982. Of course, the effects of this global Christian eco-solidarity have been disappointingly slow. But the potentiality persists and perhaps grows for it to be further materialized. And that further materialization is, of course, hopeless without a very broad ecumenism.

So, just, for one example. I loved taking part not long ago in a conference on Islam, Christianity, and the Earth. Consider the following verse of the Quran. "Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is something greater than the creation of humankind. But most of humankind do not know this truth." So I don't know of any ancient text of Christianity that so pointedly names the whole cosmic context as both greater than the human and for the most part ignored as such. And the environmentalist Ibrahim Ozdemir stresses the following remarkably proto-ecological bit of Sura 24. "Don't you see that it is Allah, God, whose praises all beings in the heavens and on earth do celebrate? and the birds with wings outspread. Each one knows its own mode of prayer and praise and God knows well all that they do."

Our Earth home needs the ecumenical collaboration of all the world religions or ways, as you all know, too, and needs it now more than ever. You know that the "Ec" of Ecumenical is from the same Greek word as the "eco" of ecology from *Oikos* home. The resources are available here on our Earth home. Take, for instance, for Intellectuals, and scholars, the Harvard series of volumes on Ecology and Religion, edited by Tucker and Grimm. I'll list them. Christianity and Ecology, Islam and Ecology, Buddhism and Ecology, Confucianism Confucianism and Ecology, Hinduism and Ecology, Taoism and Ecology, Jainism and Ecology, Indigenous Traditions and Ecology.

You don't have to be religious to appreciate the generative force, the mattering of such eco-ecumenics. In this, I was early inspired by John Cobb's sense that Christ, was calling him to become a Buddhist Christian. To empty out of Christianity its frequent spiritual egotism. Its fixation on personal salvation. It is believed that Christ names the only way and he had been writing there in the seventies to overcome its indifference to the material health of the earth. Then, Christianity can help generate cooperation between religions and beyond religions with concerned secular publics for the sake of our shared material future across the generations.

So, no matter how religious you are or are not, an eco-ecumenical solidarity can materialize across traditions imparted through you. It does not mean suppressing your anger, disappointment, and doubt, *visa v.* particular religions, or your fear and even despair about the Earth. Participating in a broad and growing eco-spirituality requires emotional honesty. As

affect theory emphasizes, emotions aren't about getting stuck in one feeling. Think of the word emotion, being moved and moving. Huh! But that being moved, not reflecting the ancient, unmoved mover of the god of Aristotle, and then of Aquinas. Process theology instead, envisions a most moved mover. Though I kind of like that accidental pluralization of most moved movers. Our emotions move us. They motivate action. They can energize new practices. They can move us beyond despair.

But it isn't just negative emotions that can move us. It's also joy which indeed has spiritual depths. See Elaine Padilla's book, *Divine Enjoyment: A Theology of Passion and Exuberance*. Letting the metaphor of God radiate enjoyment makes being created in God's image something liberating, even pleasurable. She shows not just the virtuous effects of exuberance, which aren't superficial distractions, but energizing connections us to our world. So, Padia writes, beauty becomes intrinsic to the ethical impulse, and its ecology, rather than super- superfluous supplementary subsequent or lesser. When attraction to beauty works not for greed, but for good, truly there is reason for hope.

This brings us to the effect most jeopardized and most important for our planetary future. The motivation of motivations, hope. Hope for a future that is not just survivable, but somehow beautiful. Of course, many thoughtful people, some of them my students, quietly dismiss hope as unrealistic. And they do not mean to be nihilistic. They think it is now just too late and I think they might be right. We do not know that there is a significant possibility we will not just surpass 1.5 degrees centigrade but go on up from there catastrophically. Possibility, however, is not certainty. Uncertainty is no reason for optimism which is why we must make a strong distinction.

Hope is not the same as optimism. Optimism is the opposite of pessimism. Hope, however, casts its own shadow of pessimism. It does not stifle doubt. Hope is not optimism. Optimism is an assurance that things will work out well. Optimism is the driving spirit of capitalist progress. Commodify more of the earth, make greater profits, and create better technology. It will fix, it will green everything. Hope, very differently, stays tuned to its own shadows. It knows it is not certain, it knows it does not know. It does not depend on a God who will step in at the last minute and fix everything or a God who doesn't give a damn about the material world. That guarantees other-worldly salvation to unquestioning believers. And does give a damnation to the others.

The hope I mean does not await miraculous interventions, divine or technological. The spirit of hope keeps luring us to actualize more just and earth-healing possibilities. Without it, we go passive where action is most needed. So maybe

think of hope as the embrace of possibility. Not just any effect. And I this embrace but hope. Hope is at the root of our bodily capacity to feel. So queer theorist Tasvir Pyar writes this, "affect is precisely the body's hopeful opening. A speculative opening not wedded to the dialectic of hope and hopefulness but rather a porous affirmation of what could or might be." That beautiful, queer porousness is a porous affirmation of what could or might be. I would call the dialectic that of optimism and pessimism that hope eludes.

But hope needs mattering possibilities to affirm. Hope needs possibilities that are already finding matter, finding materialization, and therefore able to call for fuller incarnation. So, for instance, I read recently that the prospects of the world staying within the 1.5 centegrees degree limit on global heating have brightened owing to the staggering growth of renewable energy and green investment in just the past 2 years. So, I felt some brightening. That's a cool fact.

Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency and the world's foremost energy economist, said that much more needed to be done; but that the rapid uptake of solar power and electric vehicles was encouraging. He said solar photovoltaic installations and electric vehicle sales are perfectly in line with what we said they should be on track to reach net zero by 2050, and thus stay within 1.5 degrees centigrade. Clean energy investments it continues in the last 2 years, have seen a staggering 40%. Increase. Birol rightly noted that greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector were still stubbornly high and that the extreme weather seen around the world this year had shown the climate was already changing at "frightening speed." So, his is a shadowed hope. No reason for complacent optimism. Those facts and the fact remains that the surface ocean temperature off of Florida reached 110, hotter than a hot tub.

So there is another major bit of recent news we must not forget on the hope side of things. It tucks the question of motivation right into the theme of generation. It's that story of the 16 young people between ages 5 and 22 in Montana who filed a lawsuit against state officials. You know about this right? They claimed that the state was not doing enough to protect them from climate damage and those young ones won the case. Judge Cathy Seley said officials violated Montana's highly protective constitution by refusing to consider the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions when they've approved new coal mines, oil drilling, and new power plants. Attorneys for the State of Montana argued back that the State's emissions were too small to make much difference to climate change. Amazingly, judge Seely rejected the argument, saying essentially that every ton of greenhouse gas counts toward global warming, and each ton

makes the plaintiff's lives worse as wildfires in Montana get worse, and streams dry up from drought. The judge said very pointedly, that the state can do something about it by denying permits for fossil fuel projects. This outcome is being called by legal observers nationally a landmark victory. It marks the first time a US. Court has declared that a government has a constitutional duty to protect people from climate change, hopeful. and no reason for optimism. Much more needs to happen fast than one state being forced, begrudgingly, to honor its own regulations. No doubt the state will appeal the decision to the Montana Supreme Court.

In the meantime, it is a story that hope can embrace as motivation for further action. A case of youthful rage materializing into creative, transgenerational action for a mattering future. It illumines one of innumerable intertwined pathways. What matters is that these pathways keep materializing. Pathways towards what? Well, maybe towards what some have called ecological civilization nicknamed "ecociv." It's another concept grounded in, should say, rooted in process theology. Process thinkers, Philip Clayton and Andrew Schwartz build on build on this concept and a little build this concept on process theology in a little recent book called *What is Ecological Civilization* and they nail the problem. Our civilization is founded on the wrong paradigm. The paradigm of control and exploitation that has caused and is causing the crisis. That is the paradigm, religious and secularized, that keeps matter abstracted from our awareness keeps our awareness disembodied, and keeps us buying in, however unconsciously, to the fallacies of misplaced concreteness, running the global economy. Keeping us numb to the matter of the earth.

If the basic paradigm of our civilization must change. That does mean we need a different civilization, doesn't it? Not just a greener version of the present paradigm. Nothing, including God, guarantees any such change. So, we might just go through a global collapse of civilization in this century. It might be followed by a pathetic few generations for the survivors. It may be some distant new start from scratch. The post Anthropocene Anthropos scratching around in the ruins or mere extinction. Who knows?

Or, in a different scenario, an environmental crisis might get great enough to put enough of us on notice and still not so great and so fast as to make it simply too late. No matter what, there will be some degree of systemic collapse that's happening given the mounting fires, the ice melts the floods, the droughts, the parts of COT per 1 million CO 2 per 1 million. There are many degrees of difference within each scenario. Each of these 2

main ones, and in either we will see ever more use of the term apocalypse. I'll get back to that shortly.

But in scenario B. B for the better scenario, we may hope, which means insist, that the ecological transition now already underway be qualitatively intensified, making possible a sustainable transition to a livable future, not just total collapse. Our civilization could then conceivably morph into eco-civilization without undergoing the worst sorts of Eco-side, and therefore suicide. We could then build on the best of this civilization. The helpful Eco-congruent technologies, protection and renewal of other species, the honoring of the organic life, as what we all share the poetry, the arts, the wisdom, traditions, even the religions, at least the ones that foster pluralism. The achievements of democratic egalitarianism, and social, racial, sexual, and economic justice. Even, perhaps of institutions a bit like this one, yours, where these conversations can happen.

All of this would depend, of course, on what the crucial eco-thinker Bruno Latour calls facing Gaia. Gaia name of the ancient earth goddess, appears now not as a divinity, not as a single organism, but as the organically mattering planet beyond all of our stale notions of nature. "We are not," he writes, "stunned spectators, witnessing the discovery of a new world at our disposal. We are witnessing the obligation to relearn completely the way we are going to have to inhabit the Old World. The old world of such an ancient planet, such complex multi-species, histories which may now be performing a reverse appropriation from that symbolized by the New World." We recognize ourselves, then, in this version of our future as what he calls the "earthbound." That's his transcription of humanity. Eco-civilization, we might say, would be the context of the earthbound. Inasmuch as we bind ourselves to earth, we find that its matter doesn't diminish, but frames our relation to the rest of the cosmos, even to what was called the heavens. And who knows? In the attempt to materialize eco-civilization, the energy of matter itself, freed from exploitation as the fuel of our anti-ecological civilization, may come to our aid in new ways. Energy may energize new effects along with anger, grief, and hope. Fresh effects of desire, beauty, and care, affect with effects. So, fresh motivations moving across generations can energize the momentum of our earthbound responsibility. But this is, this is energy in the cosmic sense, not in the sense of something we exploit. Our ability to respond. Yes, responsibility.

I suspect this cannot happen without something experienced, broadly, oceanically, a spiritual transformation. Whatever the various religions do in this, whatever role the wisdom and ways play. Whatever the post-religious expressions will contribute to the transition. So eco sieve is not a Utopia,

Utopos? No place. We, the earthbound, materialize it already, someplace here and there, knowing these beginnings have a chance of spreading or materializing in ways we cannot predict. Ecociv, yeah. It's not the Utopos of no place I'm saying.

So, we must regularly remind ourselves that we do have a goal. As we read in *What is Ecological Civilization*, the goal is named. Such a civilization can be built only by people who think first in terms of organisms and ecologies, rather than primarily in terms of machines and individuals. Even with that more hopeful scenario, we don't escape the apocalypse. As I often repeat, the ancient Greek *apocalypse* does not mean shut down or closure, it means disclosure. The history of the misreading of apocalypse, as the end has served the ends of the white Christian right all too well. If the end of the world is coming soon, hey, the earth doesn't matter. But the Book of Revelation is quite different. It's a surreal set of visions warning in code of the collapse of the Roman Empire that epochs global civilization. The ensuing collapse, John of Popmos expects, for both humanity and the rest of the planet, is nightmarish, but it isn't total. The New Jerusalem that isn't a total collapse, or what succeeds it.

Fundamentalists think that the New Jerusalem is a supernatural new creation from nothing coming down from heaven, but Biblical scholarship differs. The text isn't offering literal predictions, but dream-like visions. And the new city arises, we can say, in the sense of coming down from abstract possibility into materialization, getting earthbound and key to start wrapping up here. Let me see, I'm going on a little too long. Yeah, almost at the end here folks.

Key, the human species will have learned its lesson. There is envisioned, in the book of Revelation, a world civilization of cooperation between powers. The text imagines all the rulers of the world, writing peacefully through the always open gates of the city, and a stream flowing through the center of the city. The water of life, and on both sides growing the tree of life. This and many other spiritual traditions imagined humanity transformed into harmony with itself and the rest of creation. So now, well, yes, it is imaginable that ecociv, like the New Jerusalem, the new atmosphere and earth, could emerge from whatever rubble. But only apocalyptic fundamentalists think this is a guarantee. This is why the end of the world goes bizarrely hand in hand with secularist capitalist optimism.

Political philosopher William Connolly's work on Capitalism and Christianity US style gives an illuminating reading of that dynamic. He's focused increasingly on what he calls the Anthropocene climate machine, and the loops of aggressive denialism and passive nihilism that define it and are shadowed by the real risk of fascism. As a fully secular thinker, he came to

realize that to combat the rild economic fusion of capitalism and Christianity, some of us need to keep mobilizing a radical ecumenism of Ecosocial justice. An earthbound ecopsychology. With one branch of it an anti-fundamentalist Christianity which has its own apocalyptic edge. So oddly the old metaphor of Apocalypse can strengthen an honest hope. The hope is rooted in the ancient Biblical, Jewish prophetic tradition. A hope shadowed by unthinkable losses. That effect of honest hope may motivate us even in our generations of struggle to repeat, not to hope, that a deity will intervene, but that we can, as a species, yet undergo enough transformation. Enough to sidestep the great too late. So whatever apocalypses we fear or undergo always remember that apocalypsus means, disclose, not closed down.

Real lessons are being learned from what each new ecological disaster discloses. Even from covid environmental awareness has risen globally during the pandemic years. 82% of Gen Z registered strong commitments to sustainable practice. Gen Z is almost a quarter of the US population. I don't want to comment on that apocalyptic name Z. This guarantees nothing, this strong commitment, but it matters which is not to exaggerate hope. A possible eco-civilization is no Utopia.

So maybe we can use the word Utopia in something like the word sense Thomas More meant it when he coined the term, plays on the Greek U, meaning both not and meaning good, depending on the spelling. A good place is no place, but even when you think a good place is and will be no place, don't you darkly hope for it? Not with some stale, failed wistfulness in the context of the civil rights struggles. Baldwin put it this way, "Hope is something that has to be reinvented each day in life." So hope demands creative activation each day by each of us in our porous embodiments of possibility. By all of us are tired of both the delusional optimism and the paralyzing pessimism for the materializing, the mattering, of our planet and of an ecological civilization with the healing of Gaia.

So, in the meantime that 2 planet cartoon of Earth's complaint does not reassure us. If Homo sapiens is a sickness, the earth needs to heal from it. Could the disease become a dis-ease, acute discomfort with our status quo? Might we, the species at last take our name seriously, sapiens from sapiential wisdom? Might we wise up and rise up? That question is no joke. Thank you.

Carl Raschke: Thank you. Thank you very much. Okay, so we have a half hour now total for questions. I mean, we don't. we get over-extended here. We can maybe take... We do have another break after this. But I want to offer an opportunity for those students, graduate students, who help kind of shape this program. They've submitted our pre-submitted questions to

Catherine, which she has. But so if we could, just you know, do the one at a time, not you know. I'm not gonna I get an order call on people we've got. We've got a bunch of questions here, but that's you know who you are, and you know what your questions are, and so it's kind of first come through for serve so.

Catherine Keller: I'd be glad for you just to make comments as well. Just please...

Carl Raschke: Kevin, go ahead.

Catherine Keller: You choose people, Carl, when they raise their hands.

Kevin Hujing: Cool, right on, thank you Catherine for your presentation So my question is in regard to your book *Political Theology of The Earth*, and this tied in well, and you answered it in a few ways that I'll point out when I pose this question. I'm gonna mix the question here with my notes. So, you present us in *Political Theology Of The Earth* with this schema of the world that is currently passing away. This is the worldview as well as the political and economic shapes of power. So with this term schema, it is a worldview in the shapes of power. I see it to mean our, conceptions, that are formed by language. And then this language and these concepts form our logic of looking at the world. This could be the worldview that then forms our structures, and then those structures operate through apparatuses. So in terms of that presence with a hopeful and attentive gaze. Where do you see this schema passing taking place in a sort of concrete sense, and its deterioration, the most prevalent? In those spaces where do you see the greatest opportunity for us to cultivate new schemas, new logics, structures, and apparatuses? You mentioned renewable energy investments and legal actions such as the ones in Montana. So where do you see opportunities for us to sort of breakthrough and create together? Co-create that new world that must, and hopefully will, succeed the present passing one.

Catherine Keller: Well, that's that's the big question, Kevin, and we all need to be answering that together. I'm trying to say in whatever I say, kind of where I see that not saying that concepts are at the root of everything. There's all, every concept, every abstract possibility, is always instantly in some way being materialized, in some minor way, about all the other materializations making up it's its universe. So we're always talking about concepts and process of materialization and materialization and process of further conceptualization. Aren't we?

So, you know, first of all, that's to say that I think that the scholarly work you're all doing the academic work you're doing matters. It also materializes and it materializes all the more responsibly when you, when you tune it to the needs of your

world. The needs that you see as the priorities for transformation when you therefore tune your scholarship and demand that we all tune our scholarship to that world and understand that it doesn't diminish the quality of the scholarship. That one isn't getting superficial in one scholarship. This is an important point to make with you because you're all very involved in scholarship. Might not be an important point to make with most activist groups or religious groups. It's important for scholars to realize they aren't getting more superficial when they get more involved when they orient their scholarship to this kind of eco-civilizational urgency. I wrote a book called *The Face of the Deep*. That was quite, almost 20 years ago, that was a meditation on the deep of the second verse of Genesis, that great, that great chaos. You know that the Spirit of God is hovering over that precedes that precedes the creation. And as in I argued, the depth of God. So that that that depth of things. I want us to understand is a bottomless potentiality that our thinking taps when we are faithful to our sense of what ultimately matters.

So, I'm saying, let your ecological activism, your teaching, come from your deepest places and know that they are doing that and connect them to those steps. So that's a particularly scholarly thing to say. And you know, across the world, it's there are sometimes really good things happening, and I think we have to stay in touch with all of this. Then we forget over and over again, like, I just learned, Japan pledged 1.1 billion dollars to the United Nations green climate funds. This makes it one of the biggest contributors to support projects in the yeah... It's about projects in climate-vulnerable countries for the next the next 3 years. That's an important fact and commitment. It helps to remind us that a lot is going on that is beyond what our particular communities and networks are directly connected to, but that can help firm up our motivations. I think, first of all, you need to work through your teaching. You need to work through your local base and your community. You need to work through your synagogues, your churches, and your temples. You need to find those groups and sometimes create them that can combine studying the issue with forms of local action, you know, sometimes just in one's university. But let me stop there, I think your question needs an endless answer, and in what comes, I hope that helps a little

Kevin Hujing: Absolutely and thank you so much.

Carl Raschke: I think I'll ask cause the only 2 of the students who present the questions here. So, if she doesn't mind, because she's Catherine's student, I'm going to call on Lisa. So no some really interesting questions.

Lisa Jarnot: Thank you, Carl. And thank you, Catherine. I'm really happy about what you just said about tuning the scholarship. So I want to start from there and just introduce some ideas into the space. I would like to acknowledge that this is a very white space and that when we're talking about environmental degradation, we are the least affected by that right now. So I just want to put that in the air in terms of tuning with scholarship. I want to say something about that 1.5. So the BBC, 6 days ago, published an article, and they said that we already, in 2023, a third of the days of 2023 so far have been at 1.5. The projection now is that in the next 4 years, we're going to hit 1.5, right? So our our stuff about 2050, we kind of have to reevaluate cause we're beyond it. So, and also, I think, in terms of this idea of whiteness and privilege, and where we're at in academia, and how we tune the scholarship. The question that I had sent to you, Catherine, and Carl was about... There's a phrase that Cynthia Moe Lobeda uses when she talks about passive profiteers, right? She has an article on decolonizing the privileged. She says, how do we have passive profiteers of climate degradation, collapse become resistors to that? And so, this is what I want to throw out to this group, and to you, Catherine what is the advice that you can give to us like? Or how can we work together to talk about the fact that we are all in this space profiting from climate change? I mean, I'm doubting that there's anyone in this space whose carbon footprint is below 2.3 tons, you know. And that is the sustainability quota for each human on this planet. Most Americans are at 15 tons per year of carbon. I just don't have an answer to this, but I know that it is sitting with all of us from our positions of privilege that this is something we have not reckoned with at all.

Catherine Keller: Not nearly enough for sure. So yeah, no, I just thank you for your very specific and right-on contributions. Yeah, most environmental classrooms and groups and activist groups are mostly white in the United States. That's not necessarily a totally bad thing. It's like, you know, people of color, particularly African Americans, have very urgent issues to deal with around racism. Hopefully, we're involved in those issues, too. But the point isn't that everyone has to have the same priority of, you know ecological civilization. That is not a point I'm making. It does not have to be everyone's priority. It has to be one of our priorities. The point is that even if we will prioritize Eco-civilization. That is in part because of the racial injustice that it reeks right, that is, in mindfulness of that. That is also a reason that an increasingly strong I think proportion of environmental thinkers and activists understand themselves to be working intersectionally. Intersectionality, you all know, is a term coming out of African American womanist thinking for the

understanding that, you know, that that it isn't enough to focus just on race for African Americans, there's a possibly equal focus for some on gender or sexuality, that there has to be intersectionality. And I want to say it's interesting that there's nothing more ecological than that concept of intersectionality, right?

It's a beautiful metaphor of utter interdependence. But in our acknowledgment of the interdependence of our issues as embedded in the interdependence of our lives. Then, yeah, we, as white folk had, like that term, passive profiteers for the most part. Oh, and of course, endless African Americans are also passive profiteers, but that isn't the point I need to be making the point of a swipe being that I should. I will make it now that I have your language for it. We need to keep pulling up into shared consciousness. The point is exactly not to guilt trip any of us. We do not need that effect of guilt for a very long time. That effect does tend to shut down responsibility. We need that sense of guilt to push into the other, more enlivening effects of anger, sadness, breathing, of hope. So we don't want to guilt trip each other and create paralysis. We want to keep doing what you're doing. Bring the specific intersectionality right into play.

Lisa Jarnot: I'm gonna push back a little bit. Do you think that where we talk about the guilt trip is that also, for us in this space, white fragility speaking? I have this come up for myself, too. At what point can we, people in positions of privilege, say that calling out of where we stand in our privilege is not It's not something negative? right? It's a fact.

Catherine Keller: Ruling out is one thing, guilt tripping is another.

Lisa Jarnot: Yeah, so, right. There were some words that you were talking about responsibility, obligations, and action. Right? So I wouldn't want to kind of bring it back to that. and ask, what is the concrete place for us to stand in academia? So we're doing this scholarship, and we're thinking about what is happening to other people. Do we have a responsibility to in, a concrete way, live our lives differently?

Catherine Keller: Of course, we do. And we know that we do. There isn't a kind of magic formula for that. So we need to keep help helping each other figure out ways to strategize, to share those resources because most of us are going to remain passive profiteers just by living in this civilization in this country. So we need to use some of those, some of those profits of ours for transforming the civilization and bringing, bringing it down to the extent that it cannot change.

Carl Raschke: Yeah. Can we... I would just want to go allow one more. Can we get back to this, if you don't mind. I just want to offer a comment here. This goes back to the fact that I

was brought up a twin. I have a twin brother, fraternal twin, and whatever one of us would do something bad we usually got accused together but my mother had a different perspective. She would interrogate saying, "alright who causes the problem?" And of course, wherever we cause the problem, he's going to get in trouble, too. And the fact is that we as white folks, white people are privileged to bring this into a lot of factors. But that with privilege, as the cliché goes, great capacity, but also a great responsibility. We as academics, have a kind of lifestyle in which we don't have material privileges, but we certainly have the privilege of influence. What our people think we do shape them may not be immediate, maybe over generations, but I think in a lot of ways the more responsible, socially responsible sense of the younger generation has is because of the influence of academia. And so, we're doing that. But I want to go to JD because he was the third person who is also a student of Catherine.

J.D. Mechelke: Yes, no, it's good to be here and hear all this discussion, and I want to say you mentioned that some of your students have given up hope of some sort and I might be one. For my question I want to talk through these things, right? But I want to turn to *Facing Apocalypse*, your latest book. There you give, at the end, you give these seven scenarios. You show us this kind of method of dream reading, right? So at the end of the book, you kind of, you dream read seven scenarios from our apocalyptic present. Those futures you name verge from total extinction of human species on one hand, and on the other to an what you call an age of enlivenment. Then you and that age of enliven meant it's kind of the it's worthy of the name New Jerusalem, right? And then you provide five other futures in between those two now. When reading your scenes of the future, they do help open my imagination about the present. But I do have this anxiety that the myths of the future are too, caught up in the logic of progress. Of course, the anthropologist Anna Sing has a lot to say. She talks about, I'll quote her briefly, she says: "The trope of progress is sufficient to know the world both in success and failure. The story of decline offers no leftovers, no excess, nothing that escapes progress still controls us even until the ruination." I worry that the futures that you dream read get corralled, or in logic of progress. You know your imagined futures, yes, they don't fit easily into the either progress or failure. But I worry that they can still be interpreted, that they still function within that logic.

And so, my question, then, is, how can your practice of dream reading the Apocalypse help us get out of the totalizing logic of progress? Or have the Messianic hopes of eschatology been too caught up in the logic of progress to salvage anyway, that's what I know. I think I know your answer to that, but I'm

still curious to hear you talk about your dream reading in relation to the logic of progress.

Catherine Keller: Yeah. So I don't want to give a whole other lecture. But it's just the kind of question that might motivate that should. The answer simply is, that we have to keep naming the problem, Russ. You know, so, I bore myself a little in this paper and probably every other one. I have some critique of progress, and I have some strong distinction of process from progress. I do think process thought is a marvelous alternative, because it's a philosophy indeed, a cosmology of incredibly dynamic process that simply doesn't describe any unilateral progress. There might be some streams or stretches of that, and they probably happen in such abstraction from the rest of their world that they collapse. But what is acknowledged in process theology, and what we need to acknowledge is the possibility of genuine collective evolution. You know not just before the human species got on board, but with us, and perhaps with us it goes at a whole other temporality. So, we need metaphors of the evolutionary process of transformation that are not tropes of progress. But I think we can't be so sensitive on this, so purist. That anything that smacks of an improvement through time has to be erased, you know. Like, if a few students convert to eco-theology through my introduction to theology for first-year students and someone else thinks that's progress. Well, I don't want to erase that altogether. Say, no, no, all of you go back and unlearn what you learned. I don't want any progress in this class. So, help us just keep us fine-tuning the terms because it's the belief in progress. That's what allows our present order, even as it moves a little bit and a little bit more beyond the sheer denialism to announce that capitalism will save us with its brilliant evermore green genius. That's progress. So that, yeah, that needs to that needs to be named. Okay. Showing up. There was another question or two. You can follow up with me later, JD.

Carl Raschke: Good. Okay. Well, so it's kind of open on the floor here, or those of you who pose questions, and it gives a chance to, you know, somebody who hasn't had a chance to ask questions, do so. If there are any other questions, we have a whole battery of other questions that you guys feel free to bring forward.

Gabe Parker: Yeah, thank you Catherine, for your talk today, and for taking the time to answer these questions. For me, I was kind of thinking of this during some of the earlier presentations, too. But the idea of environmental stewardship mostly is what I was focusing on, because it kind of resonates with me. When you're discussing the disproportionate generational burden that the youth are going to bear when it

comes to climate change, I was thinking about the I want to say you're a Christian, but like the Christian and Catholic perspective of humans chose this human specialness in Magodi, that idea. How that kind of interacts with the idea of our stewardship of non-humans for the planet. And is that an ideological hurdle we need to overcome? Is it a both, a situation where it can be both? Just kind of what your thoughts are on that in general.

Catherine Keller: Yeah, I mean, it's that probably gave the key question for Christian eco-theology, you know, for the last nearly half-centuries. So, one goes round and round and round it, because there's no getting away from it as much as we want to convert to eco-social justice some growing percentage of practicing Christians. So one is always brought back to that question of how we are given dominion in the image of God. Eco-Christians of even very or especially very evangelical ecological Christians, really press that on saying dominion means stewardship. Dominion means stewardship. And I think that's fair as a Biblical argument. There's nothing in the first couple of chapters of Genesis that suggests anything but complete cooperation would be acceptable because all of these creatures are named good, good, good, good. The human being is not called very good, which is another stupid misreading of the text you hear all the time. No, it's when the human being is created, and is said to be there together with all the other creatures that God says it's very good, right? It's the whole collective. That's very good.

So we have to go as far as we can with the Biblical text to get to. You know, to the moderate and conservative Christians as best we can, and that works to some extent, and it works, through the channel of the stewardship argument. I have a hard time using the notion of stewardship myself very often because it just so easily seems to mean human superiority and human exceptionalism. So, I think we all have to find in our context ways, that work to talk about human differences. that that isn't about our being the exception. Exceptionalism, politically, and ecologically, is a very destructive rendition of what? Of what distinctiveness or uniqueness means to be. The exception is to be an expert explorer, taken out of the mix abstracted away from it, transcending it. No human beings were accepted by the creation. They were seen to have unique, distinctive, special gifts within them. They aren't exceptions. One has to fight that exceptionalism right down to the political theology of you know Carl Schmidt with the Nazi doctrine of sovereign is he who rules in the exception.

Okay, let me pause. There is that is that helpful? We can talk about our uniqueness, our distinctness are very special kind of intelligence. You know all of that as ways of saying, yeah. So

that makes us all the more responsible. And our high intelligence as a species is responsible for our extinguishing so many other species now. It's our high intelligence that's making it possible for us to destroy our future and to commit Ecocide. Right? That's our intelligence. You know, this is all high. IQ stuff behind the technology and the capitalism. It's not dumb. That's not the problem. It's eating the apple, all right. So, we have to find language to talk about our distinctiveness without causing, without blessing exceptionalism. Sorry. Go ahead.

Carl Raschke: I was just wondering if that's where the whole question of relationality comes from. Because the whole notion of the exception is in some ways, as you said, you can imply the abstraction. In many ways that it has been pre-read. People like Manolo, and a lot of theoreticians about mercantile capitalism or the origins of extractive economies which is behind technological change and the kind of transformation which has gotten us into the mess we have. But you know we have this false belief. This is all about subjectivity, realizing that the whole notion of subjectivity means nothing without the concept of inner subjectivity and cognitive philosophy, cognitive theory. Even cognitive theories of religion right now are gravitating towards this idea, which is, one of the particular inflections of the new material. I agree with you, Adam. You know I don't like that word, either. It's just a catch-all term for a lot of stuff that doesn't necessarily relate to each other. But the realization that there is an ontological commonality between our consciousness and other beings. And that's what the key is. Yeah.

Catherine Keller: yeah, no, that's crucial. It's all I maybe I maybe I fixated on a version of that very argument in many books written on geology of the Earth. But yeah, that exceptionalism political, racial, economic, ecological is all about being *excipera*, extracted, abstracted from the network of relations in which we are in constant inter-dependent connectivity in which we are trapped. If we want to feel it that way, there is no escape.

Carl Raschke: But that's really where consciousness is. Consciousness extracts us but the minute we are extracted we stand back and we can see where we came from. We can look again to decide. It allows us to look into the face of the other rather than just being in this sort of ontological fog. Yeah, I'm just using a metaphor there and so forth. So, we can begin to have a gaze. The inter-subjective gaze, which is no longer mediated by thought or objects, we could begin to experience the other in their incarnate splendor. That doesn't apply just to other human beings that you know, that applies to other living creatures and and so forth. That's what a lot of forms of Asian spirituality are

about. It's about that sensitivity to the uniqueness of other otherness. Not as other as this is an abstraction, but otherness as that creature like anybody owns that, you know.

I'm yeah, most of us are pet owners, probably, and my cat's not here. I don't know if my cat's sleeping, but my cat just sometimes wants to come and get involved in these conversations. You look at that cat and it's like that's not just, this black shape that's just happening the screen. You know, there's something going on. There's a responsiveness. there's a sub-intra-subjectivity that's not one based on quality. But it's also based on a kind of empathy.

Catherine Keller: That's right. And with the process, you have an intersubjectivity, even between electron kind of proto-subject. That's the nature of each actual occasion of becoming so. Talking about it as we're talking is rather abstract, but hopefully, our abstractions build into themselves an abstract understanding. That abstractions by themselves are not just, irrelevant, but dangerous, really destructive. Hopefully, our abstractions send us right back into intersubjectivity, a very abstract term. So yeah, we have to work that spiral very mindfully, don't we? Not just mindfully, but flesh-fully.

Carl Raschke: That's for the principal. I mean, it's quite a principle that is not abstractions, very kind of entanglement, which is all the rage right now. The new materials talk about.

Catherine Keller: In the subtitle of a book of mine from many years ago I got there before it was all the rage.

Carl Raschke: Great. Alright! Well, we're kind of out of time. But I need to let Catherine, go. This is fascinating. But does anybody else? I want to give somebody else just maybe a few minutes here to enter into the conversation, or whatever.

Dan McKanan: Yeah, I think I have the next end. So, I'll jump in. Thank you so much, Catherine, this is fabulous. I was taken, as it seemed like you were, by this happy phrase "most moved movers" and I wonder if you could rip a little bit on that, both in the sense of the plural dimension of divinity at this moment, but also in the sense of all of us as being in the modern day, and thus striving to be more moved movers. and how we can expect our ecological work to be both moved and mover. To expect other species with whom we interact to be moving us as well as being moved by us.

Catherine Keller: Well, I think you've just said, in the form of a question, what I might want to say in the form of a statement. The phrase "most moved mover" is Charles Hartshorne's, who became a leading philosopher, and philosopher of religion. He was Alfred North Whitehead's TA and he also knew Aquinas very well. So, he developed that phrase very mindfully of the most move mover. And it is kind of

wondrous, isn't it? It does, and it fits with what Whitehead calls the consequent nature of God. You know how what we call God, what the metaphor of God is. Its name is a boundless sensitivity to all that is happening. So that God is being touched by everything, moved by everything. That's what's God's experience, and then God integrates it in some fabulously, infinitely, aesthetic, effective sense that we can't even imagine moment by moment. But the point is, that the God who is actual is actualizing itself out of the plenitude of cosmic experience. So not causing it, wearing it, offering possibilities, but then receiving them and being moved by it. So to be made in the image of that God is to be taking in as much as we can. As consciously as we can, with the greatest fullness of bodily affect as we are capable of. Take it in to integrate it into the fresh becoming that you are at this moment and this moment, and this moment. In your freshness of response to all that you are moved by, all that you take in. Moved to anger as well as move to tenderness and love, right moved to rage move to action. That movement, as you take it in, you may become more and more conscious of then putting it out, and of how you do. Of what your genesis, your becoming, will generate in the world, through the influences, how you flow out into the next moment of the universe. Which can be encapsulated in theology.

In that metaphor of the most moved mover. But how do we live with that and keep moving, not just get overwhelmed by all that we feel? Oh, dear! Some feminine stereotype, you know. We want to be moved. We want to be risking that feminine stereotype and we want to be moving into the action. Or else we're just what Lisa was calling, you know, passive profiteers. So, yeah. Thank you, Dan, that intensifies the sense of the relational porosity in its materialization, in potentially great creativity.

Carl Raschke: Oh, great! Well, listen, thank you. This has been very powerful. We're supposed to have a half-hour break right now. And you. Okay?

Catherine Keller: Oh, yes, as long as you're okay with being so late because of me.

Carl Raschke: No, no, no, what'd be respectful of your time, but what we're gonna do here, I think, is what we've done before. We have some other presentations coming on now in starting 20 min it gets a long day, and you know part of me says I'm sorry to do that, but in the hand. You know, we want to give everybody a chance to see what they have to say, too.