

## AESTHETICS, MYSTICISM, AND A 'WILD' NATURALISM<sup>1</sup>

“Art is concerned with creating life...  
Art leads toward a creative and venturesome way of living”<sup>2</sup>  
(*Bernard E. Meland*)

“The lilies of the field assure us that the surpassing beauty of the world  
and the joy life holds are not drowned by the senseless and tragic suffering”<sup>3</sup>  
(*John Caputo*)

The universe as we have discovered it from cutting-edge contemporary science—especially when exploring the vast cosmic reaches of space and time via the Hubble (launched 1990 by NASA and “hungry to capture the most intimate images of the cosmos”<sup>4</sup>) or James Webb (launched Christmas Day, 2021) space telescopes—while hugely important, is almost unimaginable. Process philosopher and theologian, and longtime Dean (from 1945–1954) of the University of Chicago Divinity School, Bernard M. Loomer (1912–1985), adds a touch of aesthetic flair when he suggests the evolution of our planetary life

is not only a fantastic tale of the incredible and cunning creativity of life’s powers exhibited over vast stretches of time; it is equally an awesome and humbling story of the ‘enormous in terlinked complexity of life’ as Loren Eiseley made the point by citing the poet Francis Thompson ‘One could not pluck a flower without troubling a star’.<sup>5</sup>

Unimaginable... as in there isn’t just one other galaxy besides our own Milky Way, or just a handful more, but at least 100 billion, each containing at least 100 billion stars! Unimaginable... as in black holes, colliding galaxies, ghostly galactic structures, and a dusty supernova remnant, all of which reveal the universe is a restlessly chaotic place, constantly changing its face! “While conveying essential precision and depth to other scientists”,<sup>6</sup> all such levels of scientific and technological observations are remote, couched in language which is complex and inaccessible, generally speaking.<sup>7</sup> And where scientists themselves have often been overwhelmed by their discoveries, finding

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1 This is an edited version (with some additions) of a much longer essay, dated Winter Solstice June 2025

2 Meland. “Two Paths to the Good Life” (1942)

3 Caputo. *The Weakness of God*, 179

4 Popova. *The Universe in Verse*, 25

5 Loomer. “Size of God”, 35

6 Goodenough. *Sacred Depths of Nature*, 4

7 Efforts both past and present from such scientists and science writers/broadcasters as Carl Sagan, Chet Raymo, Marcelo Gleiser, Adam Frank, Ursula Goodenough, Grace Wolf-Chase, Lewis Dartnell, and Brian Cox, to improved

them difficult “to explain in other than scientific equations and mathematical description.”<sup>8</sup> Thus the problem: such language and presentations fail to capture both our imaginations or our feelings “to the necessary level of awe and wonder”.<sup>9</sup>

Remembering the transforming view of the planet Earth from space,<sup>10</sup> noted naturalist and science writer Chet Raymo<sup>11</sup> suggested 30 years ago that

we will be better served if scientific knowledge is wrested from scientists by poets, artists, historians, philosophers, and theologians, and transformed into a new vision of human worth, expressed in ordinary language.<sup>12</sup>

Chet Raymo is a religious naturalist. Espousing that orientation in writings some years later, he recalled: “I attend to this infinitely mysterious world with reverence, awe, thanksgiving, praise. All religious qualities.”<sup>13</sup> And some time later, reflecting on his daily walk along a path to work, through woods, a paddock, and a creek, he said:

Step by step, year by year, the landscape I traversed became deeper, richer, and more multi dimensional... Ultimately, almost without my willing it, the path became more than a walk... it became *the Path, a Tao(Way)*, a thread that ties one human life and the universe together.<sup>14</sup>

As it has been said, all religious naturalists are united by a reverence for nature.

There have been other nudges as well... Looking back a couple of centuries, to Alexander von Humboldt<sup>15</sup> (1769–1859) the most famous scientist of his age, it is clear this former mining inspector wanted to excite a ‘love of nature’. He wrote that nature had to be experienced through feelings; instead of God, he spoke of a ‘wonderful web of organic life’... all in relationship; and was the first to talk about harmful human-induced climate change, warning that humans were ‘meddling with the climate’ and that this could have an ‘unforeseeable impact on future generations’.<sup>16</sup> Humboldt saw nature with both head and heart. While current encouragement is offered when Bulgarian essayist

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scientific communication and language, are acknowledged. As too are the theologians/religious writers, Matthew Fox, Charles Birch, Thomas Berry, Lloyd Geering, Diarmuid O’Murchu, and Karl Peters

8 Berry. *Selected Writings*, 125

9 Frank. “Climate Change and the Power of Story”. (2018)

10 In December 1969 astronauts orbiting the moon on Apollo VIII caught on film the image called *Earthrising*. Four years later, eighteen thousand miles into their trip to the moon, Apollo XVII astronauts made the photo called *The Blue Marble*. And then in 1990 on St Valentine’s Day, astronomer Carl Sagan pointed the cameras on Voyager toward the inner Solar System and photographed a blurry speck...Earth. This landmark photograph came to be known as the *Pale Blue Dot*... “a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam”

11 His weekly “Science Musings” column appeared in the *Boston Globe* from 1983 to 2003

12 Raymo. “Let the Poets and Artists teach us what Science can’t”. *Science Musings* (1993), 3

13 Daley. “Chatting with Chet Raymo...” (2009)

14 Raymo. *The Path*, 3

15 Humboldt was the inspiration and guiding light of such luminaries as Charles Darwin, Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, Thomas Jefferson, Ernest Haeckel, and John Muir

16 Wulf. *The Invention of Nature*, 4

Maria Popova hinted in her recent collection on the ‘crossover’ of poetry, science, and the universe... that the language of poetry can help, because

poetry is an improbable portal into the fundamental nature of reality... but it has a lovely way  
of sneaking ideas into our consciousness through the back door of feeling, bypassing our ordinary  
ways of seeing and relating to the world... and swinging open another gate-  
way of  
receptivity.<sup>17</sup>

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An American theologian back in the 1930s and early 1940s who early on in his career sought to blend ‘aesthetics’ with naturalism (ecological imagination) was Bernard E. Meland (1899–1993). At the time he had not long returned to the USA having spent 12 months as an American-German exchange student at the University of Marburg “embracing the alluring mystical renaissance of Rudolf Otto” (1869–1937)—considered to be “the foremost theologian and mystic”<sup>18</sup> of those times.

Meland considered himself to be a naturalist, philosophically, and a mystic, emotionally. It was the ‘mystic’ character of his naturalistic position that enabled his theology “to bridge the gap between the scientifically, humanistically oriented view of religion... and the more traditional voices in American religious thought”<sup>19</sup> that had come to dominate. Some years later he was to name this the ‘appreciative’ or ‘sensitive perception’ approach to religion—one of the best ways to open oneself to specific experiences of the sacred<sup>20</sup>—and where he was highly critical of some forms of protestant religion that reacted strongly against the aesthetic side of life. “One must remember”, Meland wrote,

Christianity arose out of a culture of Judaism which embraced a view of life that was so strongly moral that at times it became aggressively hostile to the aesthetic... taking the form of a gospel of stern simplicity and oftentimes vanished completely.<sup>21</sup>

The majesty, mystery, and inspiration from the wonders of the natural world, they claimed, were not needed. They had the Bible!

Little known in this country (Australia), Meland’s thought, generally speaking, has been described as rich, complex, and nuanced. While his gendered pronouns grate somewhat now, he theologised

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17 Popova. *The Universe in Verse*, 2

18 Inbody. *Constructive Theology*, 15

19 Peden. *The Chicago School*, 137

20 Stone. *Sacred Nature*, 31

21 Meland. “The Appreciative Approach in Religion”, 195

out of lived experience of which he was a keen observer. The heart of his empirical, naturalistic theology in these early years was: can humans be at-home in the universe without cultivating illusions. “Wherever supernaturalism has influenced human thought”, he wrote again:

man has conceived his life on earth as only a temporary residence in a vale of tears. His real home was in the skies. The tragedy of supernaturalism has been that it has lured man away from the universe. It has left him hostile, fearsome, or indifferent to the great life that surges through him and through his fellow creatures.<sup>22</sup>

The expansive sense of belonging to the universe, a responsiveness to the sense of wonder, and mystical attitude, enriches human relationships thus endowing us with a ‘cosmic humility’ while curbing our ‘arrogant ruthlessness’. Those who have opened their lives widely to the ‘rich fullness’ of their environment,

have become discerningly sensitive to the happening of events about them. Poets and artists are especially receptive and responsive in this way... those whose rooting reach deeply into the environing realities that sustain them, whose perspective is continually cleansed of self-centredness, and whose mind and organism are kept plastic and expansive by experiences of awe, wonder, and reverence, find the assurance and incentive to be inclusive.<sup>23</sup>

Several years later and found among his ‘unpublished papers’ Meland expanded his initial thoughts...

[Mystical naturalism] means understanding this human response to life’s meanings which the genuinely poetic and aesthetic person reveals with a view to discerning just what that kind of human response can convey of these deeper meanings that lie about us in everyday living like a haze, or a mist, confounding our vision because we do not have eyes to see what is so full of radiance and wonder. It means a contemplative grasp of what we live with, instead of sheer utility, or scrutiny. Here the modern mystic can help to restore to us in our religious thinking what the poet and artist have provided for aesthetic thinking.<sup>24</sup>

For Meland religion was a fine art with cosmic content. Of living with imagination and the disciplines of the creative sense. His close reading of Alfred North Whitehead’s process-relational worldview<sup>25</sup> was a significant influence, especially when Whitehead offered a conception of God (Sacred) as a sensitivity within nature by which “feeling is infused into brute process, giving actuality to tenderness, meaning, and beauty”.<sup>26</sup> He always felt a kinship with Whitehead, states religious naturalist Jerome Stone.

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22 Meland. *Modern Man’s Worship*, 146-147

23 Meland. *Modern Man’s Worship*, 295, 296

24 Meland. “Mysticism in Modern Terms”, 86-87

25 In casual conversation Meland was overheard describing himself as “a rebel among process theologians” as he was a firm critic of the rationalist strand of process thought

26 Meland. *Reawakening of Christian Faith*, 92

He stresses the role of imagination in Whitehead's work, the metaphysical nature of basic categories, and the tentativeness of metaphysical generalizations... [Although] he felt that some process writers pretend to know too much, with too much certainty.<sup>27</sup>

And he remained a persistent voice urging awareness of the "tentativeness and provisional nature of our thinking and language about the world."<sup>28</sup>

One such Meland poetry/literature exploration in the early 1930s resulted in an article on the religious mood in American poetry at that time.<sup>29</sup> Especially the poets who had shared what could be called a naturalistic philosophy... a 'being at-home' in the world. Meland's study resulted in detailing four religious 'moods':

- (i) the mood of integrity—"sheer unadorned, elemental honesty in seeing things and events as they exist and happen";
- (ii) the mood of adventure, change, and openness in life—"suggests readiness to adapt to the ways of the universe as we know them today";
- (iii) the mood of readiness to meet death unafraid—"of quiet friendliness toward the inevitable end of life", and
- (iv) a mood rich in fellow feeling to animal nature, these other 'kinsmen of the wild'—"help to integrate the life of the universe in a richer, cosmic fellowship... more inter-creatural".

Poetry, the improbable portal into the fundamental nature of reality...! If Meland were alive today I am sure he would be an appreciative fan of poet Mary Oliver! "Like the language of art, poetry, and friendship," he said, "the language of religion is suggestive, not descriptive or definitive."<sup>30</sup> He did not deny the "significance of clarity" in perception and thought, "but insisted that reality is more complex than can be captured by clear and distinct ideas."<sup>31</sup>

So a proposition: To be 'mystical' shaped by an ecological imagination in our early 21st century is to not abandon our natural roots for a *supernaturalism* but to acknowledge that we are at one with earthlife, planted in its soil and in its environing atmosphere. The actuality of the world, awakening one's senses.

Awakening... when listening deeply to the wind, the sonic diversity of birds, wetlands gurgling water edges, the majestic 15 metres high stature of Angophora trees—sovereign marvels of nature and

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27 Stone. "Bernard Meland ...", 442

28 Stone. *Minimalist Vision of Transcendence*, 59

29 Meland. "Kinsmen of the Wild", 1933

30 Meland. *Modern Man's Worship*, 186

31 Stone. *Religious Naturalism Today*, 91

resistance, and for its silence. Awakening... when noticing—more than just observing—logs draped by blankets of moss, raindrops glisten from branch tips, butterflies navigating the air currents, the changing cloud formations, the kindness of earth firm under our feet, spider webs on the outside window ledge, and dandelions stubbornly growing out of the cracks of the concrete footpath... to be so thoroughly and deeply immersed one can hardly bring it all to full awareness.

Mystical naturalism, according to Meland and others, features a blending of worldviews and ideas that explore trackless places and experiences which are different from most traditional expressions of religion. A search for significance as an earth creature, often located outside traditional institutions. Deep attunement. Deep knowledge. Honouring nature ‘all the way down’. “At-homeness, in the universe...” said Meland back then, ahead of his time. Nearly 45 years later he added a cautionary lament. At-homeness entails we understand ourselves

not as plunderers and exploiters of nature’s resources, but as creatures of earth, born of its processes, nurtured and sustained by the subtle and intricate inter-change as humanly evolved organisms within this enveloping atmosphere... I cringed at the thought the Christian legacy setting its seal of approval upon it, either through glib, biblical utterances, or through intricate arguments offered by theologians whose views of man and creation hardly entitled them to be called a child of earth. And I hoped that God might find their views offensive, too.<sup>32</sup>

At the risk of mentioning too few, let me suggest, in cameo form only, the names of three whom I consider can make an important contribution today—both their legacy and/or current practise—in the shaping of a contemporary discussion on ‘aesthetics/mystical naturalism’ and who may act as bridge-builders between science and religion: Pulitzer Prize winning American poet Mary Oliver (1935–2019), Celtic theologian, poet, Irish bard “and the splendid, searching, openly ragged-around-the-edges human being”,<sup>33</sup> John O’Donohue (1956–2008), and Canadian feminist and ecology theologian, Heather Eaton. Each nominee seeks to copy the orientation and concern of the creative artist as much, if not more so, than the concern of the analytical.

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### **Mary Oliver - Poet**

“Listening to the world... Well, I did that, and I still do it. I still do it”... the ‘nature’ wisdom of poet Mary Oliver (1935–2019) as told to Krista Tippett in an interview for *On Being* in 2015. A strong sense of place, and of identity in relation to it, is central to her poetry. Her creativity was stirred by the *actuality* of nature<sup>34</sup>—to look candidly at the world—and her poems are filled with

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32 Meland, “*Grace*”, 135

33 Tippett. “Foreword”, ix

34 Meland would claim ‘therein lies the religious quality of its mood—its actuality’. “Kinsmen of the Wild” 443

imagery from daily walks: shore birds, water snakes, the phases of the moon, and humpback whales. “Just pay attention to the natural world around you—the goldfinches, the swan, the wild geese. They will tell you what you need to know.”<sup>35</sup>

Such attention and experience comes from being immersed or participating in what is, and seeing the overlooked. When asked in her *On Being* interview about ‘attention’—a theme that runs through her work—Oliver responded saying attention without feeling was only a report.

Reporting is for field guides. And they're great. They're helpful. But that's what they are.  
They're not thought provokers. They don't go anywhere... attention is the beginning  
of devotion.<sup>36</sup>

Recognised as one of America's most significant and best-selling poets, her biography notes that 'nature stirred her creativity', and, as an avid daily walker, she often pursued inspiration on foot. Her poems are filled with imagery from her walks near her home. She once said: ‘When things are going well, you know, the walk does not get rapid or get anywhere: I finally just stop and write. That's a successful walk!’

When reviewing Oliver's work one literary critic wrote: ‘Her poems are firmly located in the places where she has lived or traveled... her moments of transcendence arise organically from the realities of swamp, pond, woods and shore.’ While another commented: ‘At its most intense, her poetry aims to peer beneath the constructions of culture and reason that burden us with an alienated consciousness to celebrate the primitive, mystical visions of the natural world.’

“Song for Autumn”  
Don't you imagine the leaves dream now  
how comfortable it will be to touch  
the earth instead of the  
nothingness of the air and the endless  
freshets of wind? And don't you think  
the trees, especially those with  
mossy hollows, are beginning to look for  
  
the birds that will come— ix, a dozen—to sleep  
inside their bodies?...<sup>37</sup>

Mystical. Poetic. Nature. We need the inspiration of natural beauty, ecological diversity, and the actuality of nature—as offered in the language of Mary Oliver's poems—to both challenge and feed the deeper feeling and imagination that give meaning to our lives. There has always been those who

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35 Franklin. “Mary Oliver's Critics”, (2017)

36 Tippett. “I got saved by the beauty of the world.” *On Being* radio interview with Mary Oliver, 2015

37 Oliver. Poetry Foundation. [poetry.foundation.org/poets/mary-oliver](http://poetry.foundation.org/poets/mary-oliver)

have had experiences that awaken in themselves the mystery of life, and who have responded with wonder and awe... and a reverence that lead to responsibility. Mary Oliver was one such person.

### John O'Donohue - Theologian & Irish bard

The natural world has the capacity to inspire a response—an expression of our awe of nature, of our attraction to the mystery of existence, to something intangible—called ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ from humans. Such is the compelling Celtic wisdom of philosopher, mystic, poet, Irish bard “and the splendid, searching, openly ragged-around-the-edges human being”,<sup>38</sup> John O'Donohue. He spent most of his academic life in Germany (University of Tübingen) immersed in the intellectual field of German philosophical thought: Hegelian thought<sup>39</sup> and later, Meister Eckhart. He returned home to Ireland in 1990. After leaving the priesthood he made his home in a remote cottage in the west of Ireland. Reflecting on John's time in the priesthood, brother Pat wrote:

John saw one of the aspects of his priestly ministry as that of educating people's fingers so that they could ‘un-net their own entanglements’. The beauty of this approach is that as the layers of *given answers* are peeled back, the heart becomes filled with wild desire for the question. To put it mildly, this was something of a new approach, especially in an institution that had prided itself on having all the answers!<sup>40</sup>

The author of such classics as *Anam Cara*, *Divine Beauty*, and the collection of poetry *Conamara Blues*, one of his more popular comments was said in an *On Being* radio interview with Krista Tippett just weeks before his sudden death in January 2008, and two days after his 52nd birthday. “I think it makes a huge difference,” he said,

when you wake in the morning and come out of your house, whether you believe you are walking into [a] dead geographical location, which is used to get to a destination, or whether you are emerging out into a landscape that is just as much, if not more, alive as you, but in a totally different form, and if you go towards it with an open heart and a real, watchful reverence, that you will be absolutely amazed at what it will reveal to you.”<sup>41</sup>

Following the observations of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis—the Gaia hypothesis, which considers the whole Earth as a living process—the natural world is complex, fundamentally creative, and astoundingly interrelated, thus the meaning of ‘alive’ and that which sustains life, can result in a blurring “between living and non-living, or static and dynamic”.<sup>42</sup> For O'Donohue connecting to the landscape in such an elementary yet ordinary moment as going outside, was a way of coming into rhythm with the universe. “Landscape is not just there. It took millennia to come here.

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38 Tippett. “Foreword”, ix

39 “He received the highest accolade of any foreign student at the University of Tübingen.” (Pat O'Donohue)

40 O'Donohue, P. “Foreword”, xx

41 O'Donohue. Radio script, 2008

42 Eaton. “Forces of Nature”, 4

Landscape is the first born of creation...<sup>43</sup> Before humans ever emerged on earth. In what I consider his most important book on nature, *Four Elements: Reflections on Nature*—a collection of blessings published after his death—his brother Pat wrote in the Foreword:

Landscape was so alive for John and the wilder and more untamed it was, the more he rejoiced in it. He used to say that, ‘As humans emerge from landscape, we have a constant need for the physical, sensuous, elemental interaction with the actual landscape’.<sup>44</sup>

And of his own landscape in the valley where he was born in County Clare, Ireland—the shell of O’Donohue’s soul—the poetic is always alive... “where the mountains rise up to the horizon in gentle slopes” and on the north-west side where “the river snakes down through the landscape in a gentle flow”... “a miracle of presence”... “the endless flow of emerging possibilities”... again depicted so beautifully in his poem ‘Fluent’:

I would love to live  
Like a river flows,  
Carried by the surprise  
Of its own unfolding.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps... at the risk of pushing O’Donohue’s thought too far—but as was said earlier, O’Donohue did study Hegel and Meister Eckhart’s ‘wild’ God—at times his writings appear to reflect what American professor of philosophy and religion John Caputo calls ‘weak’ theology (“like a kiss” or a “whisper” or a “gentle breath” or “like lilies in a field”) which he compares against traditional authoritarian ‘strong’ theology. Caputo’s radical ‘weak’ theology is about language, religious imagination, and brilliant *theopoetics*—later enlarged to *cosmopoetics*—rather than religious dogma that defines and enforces.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps... both would resonate with the suggestion: it is the experience *of* living, of aliveness, beyond belief, rather than a search *for* the meaning of life, that each of us seeks. According to my reading of progressive theologian Joseph Bessler’s commentary, that is a possibility...

Playing off the language of Meister Eckhart, Caputo argues... ‘The meaning *in* life, not the meaning *of* it, is found at the point that each day is found to be a grace, an event of grace, the grace of the event. The grace of life is not a gift bestowed upon the world by a Superbeing, but is an emergent effect *on* the plane of the world’.<sup>47</sup>

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43 O’Donohue. *Four Elements*, 129

44 O’Donohue, P. “Foreword”, xiii

45 O’Donohue. *Conamara Blues*, 30

46 Caputo. *The Weakness of God*. “The transcendence of God is not that of a fist that smashes, but of a Spirit who breathes, who inspires, and whose gentle breath urges us on.” (Pg38)

47 Bessler. *Being Moved*..., 76

A respect and abiding curiosity for the awe-inspiring qualities of landscape and a capacity to predict the moods and behaviours of the land will bring us closer to an understanding of how to live as part of it and, in doing so, become well-grounded ethical beings and generous of spirit. As was John O'Donohue.

### **Heather Eaton - Feminist Theologian**

In two articles Canadian professor Heather Eaton concentrates on beauty in the natural world rather than in art or religion, and how it transforms the self. In the first, "Beauty with Save the World",<sup>48</sup> she reflects on how "dazzling, deep, vibrant, and dynamic beauty" had often seized her attention: trekking to mountains and canyons, sailing for weeks in the wind and waves, watching whales and swimming with sharks, as well as studying elephants in South Africa... and birdwatching. "I also try to grow flowers that provide gorgeous colours and scents", she said. "Beauty is transformative: to one's health, mindset, spirit, and preoccupations. It evokes gratitude, and for some, reverence."

But it is in her later article (2013), "Forces of Nature", that she suggests four insights that could be a specific bridge between the natural sciences and religious imagination:

- (i) Creativity: the natural world is fundamentally creative... from bacteria to cells to ecosystems, "the creative interactions and organisation for life are staggering. Even non-living systems are innovatively interwoven, from each living cell to planetary climate processes."<sup>49</sup>
- (ii) Ingenuity: the natural world is ingenious. Photosynthesis, for example, while a primordial Earth process, "has had to be ingenious in transforming sunlight in various conditions". So too the survival (adaptation) of birds and animals in heat and cold, wet and desert conditions.
- (iii) Interrelatedness: in the natural world it is impossible to find any life-form not bound up with others. For instance, "the interactions and exchanges among insects, flowering plants, and birds are astonishingly elaborate".
- (iv) Beauty: the natural world inspires and is beautiful... "the aurora borealis, rain, volcanic upheavals or earthquakes, thunder and/or lightening, rainbows, and desert, water or

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48 A quote from Dostoyevsky

49 Eaton. "Forces of Nature", 4, 6



but it is a necessary activity—we will not have any stories to tell in the future. As Frank concludes: stories matters.

It has been said that stories were the first form of human technology... Recognising that fact allows us to begin reframing how we think about science and its place in the quest for not just knowledge, but also for meaning.

Appreciation of the benefits of nature is an ancient wisdom we are only barely beginning to regain, as the Earth heats, glaciers melt, volcanoes pop and fizzle, rainforests are logged, tectonic plates collide, and species vanish. What is now required is a different religious sensitivity, a natural ecological spirituality. Because... spiritualities ‘come from the realm of insights rather than data’. Because... nature is the thread that completes the tapestry of life.<sup>55</sup> Taking nature to heart does not leave a person with any fewer spiritual benefits than taking to heart the teachings of *supernaturalist* traditions. “If we can go to special places, built by humans, which are designated as sacred”, writes religious naturalist Jerome Stone again,

surely we can go to special places, shaped naturally, which are recognised as sacred... There is a strong monotheistic tradition of cutting down the sacred groves. What we need to realize that to have a sense of sacred place is not tree worship... but is rather the acknowledgement of the awesome, of the overriding and overwhelming.<sup>56</sup>

Earth’s history is our local owner’s manual. We are partial products of its approximately four billion year old conditions. We are cosmic and we are local. Our very existence as Earthlings is rooted in the fundamental processes of the universe itself. Created on this earth... Of this earth... The power to fashion for this earth. So how can we not stand in awe and wonder, the most intimate heart of religious experience, before the fact of our emergence as a consequence of those same vast processes that created galaxies and suns and stars and planets! And tell about it!

The best of religious sensitivity and energy comes from our attentiveness, recognition, and imaginative appreciation of the natural world, from dawn to dusk—moments of transition which highlights that the world around us is beyond our control, ‘wild’, and on it’s own terms...

a transition from the wisdom of the sojourner... to the wisdom of the evolved earth-creature, whose spirit had its origins in the flames of the stars and the dust of the planet, whose home is the earth... and whose fulfilment as an individual and as a species requires a deep attachment to the humanising processes of this life.<sup>57</sup>

A revelatory experience. With a language of wonder and awe.

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55 A ‘theory of naturalised spirituality’ can be found in Jerome Stone. *Sacred Nature*, 76-80

56 Stone. *Sacred Nature* 116

57 Loomer. “Size of God”, 21

Aesthetics—deeply rooted aesthetics—mysticism, and a ‘wild’ naturalism... released from the captivity of abstract scientific language and supernatural religion. The appreciative approach to life where religion is, in part, a poetic enterprise. A wonder-full ‘ecological imaginary’ for our time, coupled with a new sensitivity of tenderness for ‘great music, great poetry and art’. Reframing. And reshaping rituals not only around the seasons of the year but also new ones “celebrating those moments of irreversible cosmological transformation that took place in the formation of the galaxies and in the supernova implosions that finally enabled the planet Earth...”<sup>58</sup>

Nature is not a place to visit, it is home! It is our source!

The conviction that ‘the earth is actually and literally the mother of us all’, is the beginning of a mystical naturalism...<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Berry. *The Sacred Universe*, 99 See also my liturgy ‘The Banquet of the Cosmos’ [www.rexaehuntprogressivelgy.com](http://www.rexaehuntprogressivelgy.com) in the section Liturgies/Special/Archives

<sup>59</sup> Meland. *Modern Man’s Worship*, 142

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