

# Opening Words

Life arising from death and destruction is Earth's song of hope and God's song of love. Hope and love are the food of life. In these pages we feast on both. First, however, we spend time with evil. We dare to recognize it, ferret out a few of its hiding places, and expose it.

This is not the evil of intentional or willful cruelty. Rather, it is evil that inhabits our lives by virtue of the economic policies, practices, institutions, and assumptions that shape how we live. The "we" in this inquiry is the world's small minority of extravagantly consuming people, especially those of us in the United States. Many of the movements and rhythms, the practices and products of our daily lives have destructive, even deadly impacts on countless impoverished people. Although we do not intend harm, our ways of life are killing people through climate change and through enslaving them in mines or plantations, poisoning their water or selling it on the global market, taking their land and homes, obliterating their fish supplies, and more. Moreover, through myriad forms of ecological degradation we are disrupting a fundamental quality of God's garden—its life-generating capacity. We are *uncreating*.

To repent of structural evil, we must recognize it. Morality and faith in God require recognizing haunting realities such as these named above and acknowledging our finely honed propensity to deny them.

Yet the truth of our participation in structural evil is only a partial truth. Moral vision that recognizes structural evil has a second lens that sees signs of hope breaking through the volcanic wasteland of economic and ecological violence. Hope springs forth from the courage, tenacity, and creativity of people and movements in our own land, in India and Nigeria, in Mexico and the Maldives, and around the globe who are generating alternative practices, policies, institutions, and worldviews. This book will take the reader from the terrain of "what is" to this terrain of "what could be." We will poke around in it, and find that "what could be" is, in fact, becoming. We will witness ordinary people from all walks of life forging paths toward sustainable Earth-human relations marked by justice.

Moral vision has yet a third lens. It sees that human creatures are not alone in the move toward more just and sustainable ways of living. The sacred life-giving and life-saving Source of the cosmos is with and within Earth's creatures

and elements—human included—luring creation toward God’s intent that all may “have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

In the world’s monotheistic traditions, that power is known as YHWH, God, or Allah. This sacred mystery, as understood through a Christian lens, dwells in, with, among, and beyond us. This presence brings seeds of hope, including two promises. Despite evidence to the contrary, God’s will for all of creation to have life with abundance and joy ultimately will be fulfilled. And even in the depths of human brokenness—including entanglement in structural sin—the loving, liberating, and forgiving God is present.

This three-eyed vision of seeing what is, what could be, and the presence of the Sacred will be called “critical mystical vision.” It offers a framework in which to acknowledge structural evil, name it, and counter it with its opposite: justice-making love. As such, critical mystical vision opens the door to moral-spiritual power for challenging and undoing structural evil manifest as unjust social structures.

Love that seeks justice is the counterpoint of structural evil. The magnificent call to love is heard in many tongues through many faith traditions and other schools of wisdom. From a theological perspective, all of creation is beloved by a love that will not cease and is more powerful than any force on Earth or beyond. Although embedded in systemic evil, we humans are nevertheless charged with seeking the widespread good, abundant life for all, through ways of justice-making love. For fulfilling this calling, we are bearers of that divine and indomitable love.

I suggest that we will fulfill this calling not as the people we thought we were, but as an integral and utterly dependent species in a planetary communion of creatures and elements who share origins, body matter, and—in some way beyond human ken—ultimate salvation. The provoking question remains: What does it mean for the “uncreators” to “love?” Christianity, along with other religious and wisdom traditions, must enter the question anew for each time and place, learning from the wisdom and the mistakes of the past. We must step cautiously into this mystery, moving with the humility of knowing that the question defies conclusive answers.

This volume will tease out what is entailed in loving for a particular people in a particular context. It is a context of economic and ecological violence that shapes our moral relationships with self, neighbor around the globe, and Earth itself. For the material beneficiaries of that violence, *love becomes not only an interpersonal vocation but also an economic-ecological vocation.* That the two—economic and ecological—are inseparable will become apparent.

Unraveling all the implications and gifts of loving neighbor as self in an economic and ecological sense is impossible in a single volume. We will explore one constellation of implications. It is to reconfigure the economic dimension of life, to reorient it toward building ecologically sustainable and socially just ways of living on planet Earth. The role of religion in the twenty-first century includes offering the gifts of religious traditions to this pan-human and interfaith task.

The global economy will change. Corporate-and-finance-driven global capitalism is not an impenetrable fortress. It will change, if for no other reason than that Earth's atmosphere and "services" cannot support it. The question is: In what direction and how will it change? The call to love as an economic and ecological vocation is a partial response. This book, then, is one tiny part of a much larger human endeavor, the seeming impossibility of which should dissuade no one from joining it. It is the reorienting of human life to render it both sustainable on this planet home and characterized by increasing degrees of social justice. In this reorientation we are called by God and by life itself to celebrate, relish, and stand in awe of Earth's beauty, unfolding complexity, and life-generating goodness.