



Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology

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Revisoning Human-Earth Relationships

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Our Work and our Future

Around the world, the ecological crisis is provoking a deep re-evaluation of the dynamic between religion and culture in a multitude of religious contexts. There are local efforts to reclaim the sacred dimensions of water, land, or seeds. There are thousands of small projects in diverse religious communities, such as those helping to make water accessible or potable. Religious activists are participating in social movements, joining campaigns for corporate resistance, and forming global networks of socio-ecological sustainability that transcend customary ethnic and religious boundaries. A group of Canadian religious scholars have worked quietly but consistently at this nexus of religion and ecology for a decade or more at the local, regional, national and international levels. Canadian contributions included research, public policy formation, issue-specific efforts, activism, education, as well as popular and scholarly publications.

Some of us decided it was time to consolidate and organize our efforts in Canada. In March 2004, we officially launched the Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology, CFORE, (www.cfore.ca). The group is affiliated with the Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE), an international initiative based at Harvard University (<http://environment.harvard.edu/religion>), which provided a start-up grant. CFORE represents a desire to invoke and evoke religious responses to the ecological crisis in Canada. Its mission is to facilitate transformative dialogue and education. Over the next few years CFORE will establish a national presence with a series of lectures and discussions across Canada. Our aim is to bring people together in inter-disciplinary and inter-religious forums to foster dialogue, gather information, and stimulate a transformative spirit. CFORE's goal is also to advocate for ecological sustainability in Canada and influence public policy. We represent a blend of activism and academia.

The launch took place at the University of Toronto on March 7, 2004 with a talk by Dr. Kenneth Kraft who represented FORE. A renowned Buddhist scholar and practitioner of Engaged Buddhism himself, Dr. Kraft offered insights into the nature of awareness. Kraft introduced a classical teaching called "how to hear the birds sing", a simple sounding practice that, in fact, exposed the challenges of being attentive to and aware of the present moment. He gave this practice an ecological interpretation, arguing that we must awaken to the earth. Dr. Kraft spoke of the need to bend our awareness to the earth, to what it teaches, and to its suffering.

The CFORE launch drew some two hundred people. Countless more who could not attend expressed interest in and appreciation for this initiative. The following day we held a consultation on the development of CFORE with activists and academics, including people from religious and environmental studies, as well as from the Jewish, Buddhist, Bahá'í, Daoist and Christian traditions. The interest in CFORE has been overwhelming and exciting. We have been contacted by numerous individuals and groups with requests for materials, offers to organize conferences and collaborative efforts, as well as countless expressions of solidarity. We have received notices from Turkey, Denmark, India, the United Kingdom, and the United States commending the launch and notifying us of similar efforts elsewhere. Canadian media have publicized what we are doing. CFORE is revealing and facilitating, rather than creating, a consciousness that is emerging both in Canada and around the world.

Since March we have held meetings and consultations, provided two public lectures, and presented papers at the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion at the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities in Winnipeg as well as at the Parliament of World Religions in Barcelona, Spain. We are organizing a series of dialogues in Nova Scotia, Alberta, and Ontario and have plans for more in other provinces. We are currently working on academic consultations, research and publications. Moreover, we plan to develop CFORE as a public presence in Canada. We have connections with the Sierra Club of Canada, Greenpeace, the Environmental Studies Association of Canada, and Faith and the Common Good.

CFORE is now on the scene. It is a modest effort but with a large vision and concrete plans. We have a steering committee consisting of the co-chairs James Miller at Queen's University in Kingston (Daoism and ecology) and myself, Heather Eaton at Saint Paul University in Ottawa (ecology, feminism and theology), as well as members Peter Timmerman (Buddhism and environmental activism) at York University in Toronto, Anne Marie Dalton (gender, ecology, development and religion) at St. Mary's University in Halifax, and Stephen Scharper (religion and ecology) at the University of Toronto. While the committee does not represent the diversity of Canadian society, we hope that CFORE can become inclusive of the many voices, perspectives, cultures, and spiritual traditions in Canada.

Heather Eaton (an expanded version of this article will be published in the next issue of *The Ecumenist*)

Orientations, Goals, Strategies and Projects

CFORE's steering committee has been working hard to define our goals, priorities and activities. Our broad mission is to foster change through education by undertaking academic research, educational outreach and dialogue with scientists, activists, religious professionals and members of the public.

Orientations

1. A CFORE event is interdisciplinary and/or inter-religious, with activists and academics
2. CFORE is explicitly transformative: to foster dialogue for transformation (ecological, socio-political, among activists and engaged academics)
3. CFORE is specifically Canadian: regional representation, engage with particular projects in diverse bioregions, reflects Canadian culture(s), landscapes, and consensus building.
4. CFORE will try to host events across the country.

Educational Goals

1. Promote research and teaching about religion and ecology in Canada;
2. Engage Canadians in dialogue about the role of religious values in shaping attitudes and behaviours towards the natural world;
3. Make a Canadian contribution to the Harvard Forum's overall goal of revisioning human-earth relationships;
4. Advocate for a sustainable ecological future and influence public policy on key issues.

Strategies

1. Gain objective understanding of current state of religion and ecology in Canada and make this knowledge more widely available so as to gain wider public awareness of this issue.
2. Engage in educational outreach by organizing public dialogue forums across Canada.
3. Engage in high quality peer-reviewed academic research on religion and ecology so as to make a Canadian contribution to the field.
4. Identify issues where CFORE can partner with government and NGOs.

Projects

1. **CFORE Dialogue Series.** Interdisciplinary and/or inter-religious events that aim to bridge academic, religious and activist worlds
2. **Academic Research Initiatives** including a panel in May 2004 at the Canadian Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Winnipeg and a joint panel in May 2005 with the Canadian Society for the

Study of Religion and the Environmental Studies Association of Canada.

3. **Publications:** We are in discussion with publishers to make a broad array of materials available. Projects include book series, journal articles and internet materials on religion and ecology in Canada.

Land, Food and Faith: The Values at Stake in Canada's Agriculture Industry

On October 30, 2004, the Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology organized a public dialogue forum on Land, Food and Faith: The Values at Stake in Canada's Agriculture Industry. Here is James Miller's report.

A quiet revolution is taking place in the way Canadians consume their food. Not only is the \$1 billion organic sector growing at 20% a year, increasingly consumers are demanding a relationship with the farmers who raise the animals, grow the vegetables and produce the dairy products that end up on our dining tables. The popularity of farmers' markets, and schemes for direct-to-door delivery of organic vegetables show that city folk are no longer content with mass-produced food distributed through impersonal supermarket chains. Are spiritual values influencing these consumer trends?

At the recent discussion forum organized by the Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology (CFORE), Ted Zettel, an organic dairy farmer and president of Organic Meadow, Inc., spoke of a spiritual conversion that brought him to farm in an organically sustainable way. He asked: "Is there a spiritual truth that opens us up to a holistic, ecological point of view?" Put like that, farming is more than just a business concerned with maximizing profit. It is a way of life with ethical and spiritual obligations to the land, the animals and to future generations.

For Jim Profit, well-known for his campaign against a Wal-Mart in Guelph, this trend towards sustainable agriculture is not just about the farmers. It also involves the choices that consumers make. Increasingly Canadians are demanding an ethical and even spiritual relationship to the land and to the animals—the sources of our food. But is this relationship a luxury that only the wealthy can afford?

Ann Clark, a professor of plant science at the university of Guelph, noted that conventional food at big-box retailers is often cheaper than locally-produced organics. But this is only because industrial farming externalizes many of the costs of farming, leaving governments and tax payers to pick up the tab for subsequent environmental costs such as cleaning up the phosphates in our water supply. Organic farming is more intelligent, she said, because it helps prevent these environmental problems from arising in the first place. Industrial farming tends foolishly to ignore the reality that "nature bats last."

All this comes down to the question of whether we truly respect the land. The Ontario government currently faces

opposition from developers who want the option to pave over farmland with more subdivisions and more roads. Sallie McFague, a well-known author and ecofeminist theologian, argued that we have much to learn from First Nations cultures about the value of the land: "Without good land, none of the other goods of human existence is possible."

The question of sustainable agriculture is one that touches everyone who eats food. Food is not just a matter of economics and science. For many of Canada's diverse religious and ethnic communities including Canada's First Nations, food and land carry deep cultural and spiritual weight. Policymakers who work to protect Canada's farmland and deal with our agricultural crises should be inspired by the historic spiritual bonds forged between Canada's farmers and their land. They should also be guided by the choices that consumers increasingly making to support local, sustainable agriculture and the farming families who care for the land.

James Miller

God's Green Earth: Religion and Ecology

CBC Radio One will be airing a special edition of *Tapestry* on Sunday, February 20, 2005. Entitled *God's Green Earth: Religion and Ecology* the program is an exploration of the growing religion and ecology movement inspired by the ideas of Thomas Berry. The program covers the work of the green nuns in Antigonish, Nova Scotia and features interviews with Heather Eaton, co-chair of CFORE, and Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-chair of the Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology. Mary Hynes, the producer of *Tapestry*, has been working with CFORE and other research and religious groups on this project for several months, and we are very excited that the final product will air shortly. We hope that you will be able to listen to the program either on air or online via the CBC website at <http://www.cbc.ca/listen>

Tapestry airs on Sunday at 2:05 p.m. ET, AT, CT; 2:35 NT; 3:05 PT; and 4:05 MT on CBC Radio One. The program was originally scheduled for January 9, 2005 but was postponed. The new air date is Sunday, February 20, 2005. For up-to-date information visit the *Tapestry* website at <http://www.cbc.ca/tapestry>

Endorsements of CFORE

We applaud the initiative and spirit of the Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology. We are encouraged by the growing Canadian commitment to the development of a new field of study with important implications for public policy. The engagement of religious communities in the protection of the environment is a vital component in creating a sustainable future for the Earth community. *Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, founders of the Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology*

It is very good news that Canada will have CFORE. This is an important development; a continuation of the Great Work and another indication of hope for the future. *Thomas Berry.*

The Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology adds a much needed dimension to environmental work; the sense of the sacred in the natural world. As someone once said, 'why is it when we destroy something man made, we call it vandalism, and when we destroy something God made, we call it progress?' *Elizabeth May, Director of the Sierra Club of Canada*

The religions have a critical role to play in promoting an ethic of respect and care for the greater community of life, of which humanity is a part. The formation of the Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology is a welcome step forward in generating dialogue within and among the religions on this issue. *Steven C. Rockefeller, Earth Charter Commission*

The establishment of CFORE is a significant move forward in the realization of a more sustainable world, in the intersection of spirituality and ecology. Meaningful change only happens in these untidy intersections. *Ann Dale, Professor, Science, Technology and Environment, Royal Roads University, British Columbia*

Our inter-connectivity is even deeper than so-called 'deep ecology' suspects. This message is woven into the mystical experiences of all religious traditions. Your efforts in bringing Ecology and Religion together will help to heal the fragmented thinking of our times, and hence to a healthy planet. *Dr. Doug Seeley, National Secretary, The Sufi Movement of Canada*

Thank You!

We are grateful to all our institutional and individual donors who have generously supported CFORE's work since our launch last year. In particular we gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology, Queen's Theological College, the Elliott Allen Institute for Theology and Ecology, the Ecology Project, the Canadian Coalition on Ethics, Ecology and Religion, Saint Paul University, the United Church of Canada Energy and Environment Program and the many generous individual donors who have made voluntary contributions at our events.

CFORE is a not-for-profit educational organisation that operates financially out of Queen's Theological College. Donations to the work of CFORE in the amount of \$20 or greater will receive a charitable tax receipt. Make cheques payable to Queen's Theological College-CFORE and send them to James Miller, Queen's Theological College, Kingston, Ont., K7L 3N6.

Calendar of Events

2004

- March 7 *Buddhism, Nature, and the Ecological Self*. Inaugural lecture by Ken Kraft
- May 13-16 Participation in *Spirit Matters: Wisdom Traditions and the "Great Work"* at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
- May 16 *One Earth, Many Religions: Success Stories* featuring Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-chair of the Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology as well as members of the CFORE steering committee
- May 30 – June 1 CFORE panel at the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion (CSSR) Congress: University of Winnipeg
- October 30 *Land, Food and Faith: The Values at Stake in Canada's Agriculture Industry* with Sallie McFague, Ted Zettel, Ann Clark and Jim Profit.

2005

- February 20 *God's Green Earth: Religion and Ecology* on CBC Radio One
- March 3 CFORE and the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre at Queen's University will co-sponsor a roundtable on native traditions and the environment. The roundtable will feature the work of native filmmaker Danny Beaton. Further information will be available at www.cfore.ca
- May CFORE joint panel with Environmental Studies Association of Canada and Canadian Society for the Study of Religion at the University of Western Ontario
- Fall CFORE panel discussion at St. Mary's University, Halifax

2006

- Winter CFORE panel discussion at the University of Alberta

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Steering Committee Members

James Miller, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor and Co-ordinator of Graduate Studies at Queen's University Department of Religious Studies, and co-chair of CFORE. He writes and teaches about Daoism, the indigenous religion of China, and has published *Daoism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: One World 2003) and co-edited *Daoism and Ecology* (Cambridge: Harvard 2001). His current research investigates the place of traditional Chinese religions in fostering ecological sustainability in mainland China.

Heather Eaton, Ph.D. is a professor at the faculty of theology at Saint Paul University in Ottawa, and co-chair of CFORE. She teaches and publishes in the areas of religious responses to the ecological crisis, particularly the relationships between ecology, feminism and social transformation. Her work includes interreligious responses to ecological crisis, especially in light of the contributions of Thomas Berry. Heather's work is published in journals and books, including *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies* (Continuum, 2004), and *Ecofeminism and Globalization: Exploring Religion, Culture and Context*, co-edited with Lois Lorentzen, (Roman and Littlefield, 2003).

Anne Marie Dalton, Ph.D. is associate professor of Religious Studies at Saint Mary's University, Halifax. Her area of research and teaching is religion and culture, and religion and ecology, with an emphasis on the developing world. She completed a project on community based environmental management in China and Vietnam. Anne Marie was a student of Thomas Berry and is the author of *A Theology for the Earth: The Contributions of Thomas Berry and Bernard Lonergan*.

Peter Timmerman is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York, and an Associate Faculty member of the Institute for Environmental Studies, University of Toronto. He has published extensively on environmental issues, including sustainable development and the ethics of high level nuclear fuel waste management. He is editor of the Social and Economic Dimensions volume (IV) for the Encyclopaedia of Global Environmental Change, and a director of the Canadian Coalition for Ecology, Ethics, and Religion (CCEER). Peter is a Zen Buddhist.

Stephen Bede Scharper, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of religious ethics with the Department and Centre for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. He is author of *Redeeming the Time: A Political Theology of the Environment* (Continuum 1997) and co-author with his wife Hilary Cunningham of *The Green Bible* (Orbis 1993). His main research and teaching is in the area of religion, culture, ethics and ecology. He has contributed numerous reviews and articles to scholarly and popular publications.