Introduction to the Journey

This book recounts a journey. It took place over the last several decades of the twentieth century. It continues into the twenty-first century, with new impetus, louder wake-up calls, and evidence still accumulating that a good future depends upon staying the course. **Eco-justice** is the journey itself as well as the outcome toward which it aims. The course is rocky, with enormous obstacles. They include not only the shortsighted self-interest of the powerful but also the deep, pervasive assumptions of our culture about progress and growth, the good life, and the relationship of humankind with nature.

The essays in this book exemplify a fresh grappling with the idea and the issues of eco-justice over a period of two decades. They provide a significant historical account of the eco-justice journey, largely from the standpoint of the formation, program, and publications of the Eco-Justice Project and Network, which was based at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. The authors demonstrate a decidedly new awareness of reality and a distinctively contemporary perspective on nature and history. In my introductory Editor's Notes, looking back from the turn into the twenty-first century, I seek to maintain the theme of a journey against obstacles, reflecting a momentous time and imparting lessons for ongoing response and struggle.

I speak of the journey as one deeply engaged in it. I believe that my personal awakening and involvement were to a large extent representative of the Eco-Justice Network. Of course we—colleagues and companions—had considerable diversity among us, particularly in regard to the deepest roots of our embrace of the eco-justice values. But my participation enabled me to develop a reasonably comprehensive and coherent framework of thought for describing and interpreting the movement in which we were engaged.

The Times and the Movements

I had served as a minister in higher education for some twenty years before turning on to eco-justice. In all that time I believed

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firmly that justice in the social order was inescapably imperative for Christian faithfulness and responsible human action, but I did not yet understand justice in its ecological connections and dimensions. A major early step in my awakening came with the first Earth Day, in April 1970—not just the day itself but the entire academic year leading to it. Until that year I had no idea of the extent of the poisonous pollution from industrial production. Some years before, however, I had been roused to concern about population growth, by the message that natural and social systems could not indefinitely withstand the "explosion" of human numbers.

In 1970 I began to ask questions about the American economy. Through phenomenal growth in the post-World War II years it had extended a comfortable standard of living, for the first time, to a majority of the population, though still leaving a large minority behind. Could any eventual inclusion of these nonparticipants and the impoverished majorities in Third World countries continue to hinge upon ever greater economic growth in a world with more and more people? With questions like this I began my own journey toward eco-justice.

In 1970 and 1971 I was finally completing my doctoral program at Union Theological Seminary in New York, with a thesis on "Contextualism in Contemporary American Protestant Ethics." I examined several types of ethics, each of which put ethical decision into a context of something happening. Contextual ethics, I wrote, emphasizes the importance of the context in shaping the content of decisions about the right or the good or the fitting thing to do.

I did not examine a specifically ecological context of decision, as I surely would have if my project had been undertaken a few years later. Nevertheless, the emphasis on what was happening—on contemporary conditions and events—prepared me for an analysis of the "eco-justice crisis." I subjected the conditions and events of our time to the basic, abiding biblical, Christian norm of love inclusive of justice. I combined this abiding norm with the biblical, Christian understanding of God as involved in this world's affairs, the contemporary no less than the ancient. The context subjected to the norm and understood as important to God was the tumultuous time of the early 1970s. Several dynamic movements for justice for oppressed people were proceeding and converging. And now came a renewed and passionate mobilization in behalf of nature.

As the 1970s began, the civil rights movement, following the marches, riots, and gains of the 1960s, had turned its attention to persistent poverty and the subtle (or not so subtle) exclusions of

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African Americans from full participation in the economy of abundance. The women's movement, protesting male domination and asserting equality and partnership with men, was gathering momentum. A little later came an increased national awareness of the magnitude (and obscenity) of hunger around the world, and new efforts by the churches to address or alleviate this global problem. But the most dramatic and strident mobilization in the new decade opposed the unjust war in Vietnam. This movement peaked with the "incursion" into Cambodia, the fatal shots at Kent State, and the mounting toll of death and destruction suffered by the Vietnamese people, the U.S. soldiers, and the Vietnamese landscape.

These drives and mobilizations sought justice. In one way or another they protested the afflictions of the vulnerable, the marginalized, and the weak at the hand of established power. As student protests against the war intensified, with nonviolent and sometimes violent resistance, the nation and the churches became severely divided. When some legal defense funds of the United Presbyterian Church were allocated to Angela Davis, a storm of protest arose within the denomination. She was black, female, antiwar, and anticapitalism.

In the midst of the complexities and turmoil of these justice movements came the resurgent environmentalism. Many Americans, wearied by the controversies and the abrasiveness of black and antiwar activism, welcomed the environmental movement as a blessed relief from the justice struggles. Surely everyone wanted clean air and water. On the other hand, many civil rights and antiwar activists rejected environmentalism as a craven cop-out from the struggles for justice to people.

The Eco-Justice Project and Network was founded on the conviction that both of these ways of viewing and shaping environmentalism had to be emphatically rejected. Concern for the earth and its myriad creatures and systems should not, must not, be a turning away from the cause of oppressed and suffering people. The concept of justice must be expanded to embrace all creation, human and nonhuman. Earth and people would thrive together or not at all. And the road to eco-justice would be no relief from controversy and opposition.

Launching the Project

In 1972 I was transferred by United Ministries in Higher Education (UMHE) in New York from my position with the Board for

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Campus Ministry of the Rochester Area to the staff of the Southern Tier Area Council of UMHE, with a base at Cornell University in Ithaca. In the summer of that year as I prepared to move, I read *The Limits to Growth* by Donella and Dennis Meadows and their colleagues at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The authors, a team of systems analysts, reported their computer-based projections of five interacting global trends—population growth, the application of capital to industrial production (economic growth), food production, environmental pollution, and resource depletion. Their projections indicated that the world was heading for "overshoot and collapse" sometime in the twenty-first century if these trends continued. Human numbers and industrial output would grow beyond the capacity of planetary systems to sustain them, and then would decline or collapse more or less precipitously. Obviously that would entail massive suffering, premature deaths, and social as well as environmental breakdowns and upheavals.[1]

This book galvanized and focused the concern I had begun to feel, that human beings were carelessly and cruelly abusing nature and doing so in ways that would redound harshly and perhaps fatally upon themselves. In those days, UMHE in New York was seeking ideas for area-based ministries that would be responsive to the times and capable of drawing together the resources of church and university in a common concern for the larger society. I worked with Frank Snow, who had succeeded me in the Rochester area, and others to develop a project that would combine the concerns of ecology and justice. It was indeed a response to the times: the radically new awareness of the limits imposed by nature upon human behavior and demands together with continuing struggle against old injustices in their distinctively contemporary forms.

Throughout 1973 we had monthly meetings in Seneca Falls, halfway between Rochester and Ithaca, of a small study group composed mainly of campus ministers and faculty people. We examined this new consciousness of ecological limits and its implications for justice, survival, and the values by which people live. Only half facetiously, we sometimes dubbed ourselves the "Club of Seneca Falls," a takeoff on the Club of Rome, the international group of scholars and industrialists to which *The Limits to Growth* had been a report.

From the study group came the convening of a regional consultation of church and university people from three of the areas—Southern Tier, Genesee (Rochester), and Central New York—into which UMHE had divided its work. We asked participants to con-

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sider themselves the Eco-Justice Task Force,[2] with intention to stay involved. The theme of the consultation was "Coming to Terms with the Limits to Growth: Fact, Value and Practice." The keynote speaker was Norman Faramelli of the Boston Industrial Mission, one of those who had already given currency to the term eco-justice.[3]

Because there was no way for a task force on eco-justice to complete its "task," our task force evolved into the Eco-Justice Project and Network (EJPN). The project was sponsored by the Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy (CRESP) at Cornell University and by UMHE in New York. Upon the dissolution after a few years of the latter organization, Genesee Area Campus Ministries became cosponsor with CRESP, while the project maintained its headquarters in Anabel Taylor Hall, the religious affairs building on the Cornell campus.

Addressing the Issues

EJPN put on a remarkable series of local/regional/national conferences, colloquia, and forums from 1974 to 1992. These presented the big picture of the global eco-justice crisis: the environmental degradation and ecological constraints and limits, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the massive deprivation, hunger, suffering, and inequality among people, most of which were unnecessary and therefore unjust. We defined a number of major issues of the day as eco-justice issues, so-called because they could not be addressed responsibly without the eco-justice perspective: hunger, energy, lifestyle, economics, good work, and peacemaking, as well as specific environmental problems. We dealt with practical matters of solid waste, the particular concerns of women in the eco-justice crisis, and the emergence of "eco-communities." Speakers and panelists included Kenneth Boulding, Roger Shinn, Hazel Henderson, John B. Cobb, Jr., E. F. Schumacher, Amory Lovins, Barry Commoner, Hans Bethe, Kenneth Cauthen, Paul Sweezy, Murray Bookchin, Robert Lekachman, Jeremy Rifkin, Herman Daly, Elizabeth Dodson Gray, Donella and Dennis Meadows, Gar Alperovitz, Larry Rasmussen, Gerald Barney, Maurice Hinchey, Lois Gibbs, John Haught, William Clark, William K. Tabb, Heidi Hadsell, and James A. Nash.

EJPN carried on extensive education and outreach addressed to churches, campuses, and communities. Programs included a mini-course taken to church and other groups on "Eco-Justice: Crisis and Response"; a Fact-Value-Policy Colloquium on energy issues

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and another on steady-state economics; a long-running Cornell faculty study group on The Global 2000 Report to the President; collaboration with Rochester Area Colleges on Peace Education and Global Studies; a continuing education course for clergy and lay leaders; and a "Beyond the Year 2000" academic course at Cornell. We prepared several slide presentations, notably one shown many times on "Untangling the Waste Knot," developed by Will Burbank, my successor as EJPN Coordinator. Mary Jeanette Ebenhack, Burbank's successor, put together a year-long forum series in connection with the EcoVillage development in Ithaca.

EJPN staff contributed to national denominational and ecumenical responses to the eco-justice crisis, including the launching of the Eco-Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches in 1984, and the policy statement of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) entitled *Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice*, adopted in 1990. A study and program group of EJPN produced a curriculum manual, *A Covenant Group for Lifestyle Assessment*, which was published (1978 and 1981) by the United Presbyterian Program Agency and used extensively by four denominations. The United Methodist Board of Discipleship made it the basis for a year-long series of lifestyle conferences around the country, led by a Roman Catholic sister. I took advantage of fairly frequent opportunities to contribute to journals or books, as did EJPN's Associate Coordinator, Earl Arnold.[4]

The Journal of Eco-Justice

EJPN initiated its own publication in January 1981 under the leadership of Associate Coordinator Ingrid Olsen-Tjensvold. This was an outgrowth of our mimeographed newsletter, *Eco-Justice Themes*, which had begun in 1974. We called the new journal *The Egg*, a name inspired by a poem of Nikos Kazantzakos. The poem speaks of the present and the coming moments as "horrifying." "But the moment further on . . . will be utterly brilliant . . . [for the] belly of the earth is still full of eggs."[5]

There was always a bit of friendly contention about the name. We became careful to add *A Journal of Eco-Justice.* Some of our folks tired of needing to recover and explain the name's origin. In 1993 it was changed to *Eco-Justice Quarterly*.

The first editors were Ingrid Olsen-Tjensvold and her successor as Associate Coordinator, Sharon Lynn Lloyd (now Sharon Lloyd-O'Conner). When a staff reduction became necessary in late 1983,

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the editorship fell to me. I continued until 1991, when Dieter T. Hessel took over for a two-year period as editor with me as senior editor. In national Presbyterian staff roles, Hessel had given institutional and theological leadership to denominational and ecumenical incorporation of eco-justice into church program and mission. During the final two years of the journal there were guest editors under the oversight of Dana Horrell, who was EJPN Director from 1992 to 1995.

In 1985 the Eco-Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches became a cosponsor of the journal. Denominational members of the Working Group ordered copies in bulk and distributed them to their own constituencies. Subscribers, EJPN members, exchanges, copies for conferences, and persons and offices we kept in touch with but never charged added up to only a few thousand but were spread throughout the country and reached a few overseas destinations as well. We believe *The Egg/Eco-Justice Quarterly* had influence and impact greater than the small circulation would suggest, and greater than might have been expected from the limited resources of budget and part-time staff that kept it going.

No other journal has been as intentional and consistent in maintaining an explicit emphasis on eco-justice—ecological wholeness and social and economic justice in their essential connection.

Meaning, Values, and Vision

The ecology-justice connection belongs to the meaning of the term as we insisted on defining it. Eco-justice does not mean merely another aspect of justice, so that now we have to speak of social justice *and* eco-justice. The term eco-justice retains the ancient claim upon human moral agents to build and nurture responsible, equitable, compassionate relationships among humans in the social order. And it incorporates the realization that has come like a revelation to our own time, that human societies cannot flourish unless natural systems flourish too. It affirms, moreover, that the nonhuman realm is not merely instrumental to human well-being but intrinsically value-laden in its own right.

Explaining eco-justice, I have sometimes said that the "eco" is for ecology and the "justice" is for Jeremiah—reflecting my indebtedness to the prophetic strand central to the biblical story as well as to the ongoing prophetic tradition in Judaism and Christianity. As for the intrinsic value not only of human but of nonhuman being,

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this is rooted, I find, in the biblical, Christian understanding of God as Creator, the source, lover, ruler, sustainer, and ultimate redeemer of all creatures, all that is. The Creator's creation encompasses the long evolutionary process and the cycles, systems, interdependencies, balances, and beauty that make life possible and good.

The EJPN originated out of Christian campus ministry, and the greater part of its financial support over the years came from church bodies. Certainly not all EJPN members, however, nor all the readers of the journal, acknowledged a biblical or Christian rooting. We sought a membership and a readership inclusive of any who actually or potentially felt the power of the claim to care about both earth and people. For Christians speaking to Christians, it was appropriate to appeal to the biblical, Christian story and to make a contextual, contemporary analysis of that story's valuation of justice, creation, and community. At the same time, however, we found throughout EJPN a shared commitment to certain eco-justice values, and we generally could agree as to which contemporary issues most urgently needed to be subjected to those values.

It was actually a bit tricky to make the journal speak to people of faith and show how their faith made those values integral to faithfulness, and at the same time to keep with us those persons genuinely committed to eco-justice but resistant to any implication that their commitment needed to depend upon religious belief and affiliation, Christian or otherwise. Perhaps there were some who thought the journal was too Christian and others who thought it not Christian enough. On the whole, I think we succeeded in speaking with integrity to inform and challenge Christians, without losing the EJPN companions with a different grounding.

We in the Eco-Justice Project participated in the development of an eco-justice ethic, which has become characteristic of denominational and ecumenical thinking, reporting, and writing on ecology and justice. This is evident in the policy statements and study materials coming from the churches belonging to the National and World Councils of Churches and from those Councils themselves.

Four eco-justice norms or values (normative values) emerged as particularly relevant to this time in history, the time of the eco-justice crisis, a momentous time of turning from one historical era to the next. Although the number of values on the list (we started with three) sometimes got larger, I felt that the additions were actually encompassed by the four. It seemed useful to keep the number short.

Selection 2 elaborates the four norms of participation, sufficiency, sustainability, and solidarity. The first two—participa-

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tion and sufficiency—convey the distinctive contemporary meaning of justice. Because of their necessary connection with sustainability and solidarity, justice has to be understood as eco-justice.

These normative values provide the basis for envisioning an eco-just future. Eco-justice means a world with various forms and levels of community in which all members participate in obtaining and enjoying sufficient sustenance from nature. It means a world in which the arrangements for drawing sustenance are shaped, not only by human need and want, but also by appreciation of the natural world and respect for the rightful place of nonhuman creatures, the integrity of natural systems, and the claim for a viable habitat that all the future generations of creatures, human and nonhuman, make upon the present. Eco-justice means the well-being of all humankind on a thriving earth. It means a sustainable sufficiency for all.

The Rocky Road Ahead

We do not imagine that the journey to eco-justice leads to a utopian future. Neither eco-justice nor the kingdom of God will come to more than partial realization in the historical drama. But we are called to participate in the drama, the continuing story, and to respond to our best discernment of God's project in our time. The stark realities of our time—and, to the eyes of faith, God's judging, liberating presence in them—make the journey necessary. These realities contradict the modern view of the world and demand a new perspective that acknowledges the interdependencies necessary for life and rejects the anthropocentric assumption that human beings have the right and the wit to conquer nature.

The sustainability factor shows that we humans cannot long continue to dominate nature as in the modern era we have tried to do. Nor can we satisfy the needs of the human family unless we in the developed world reduce our material wants and build communities and economies of cooperation, sharing, and equitable distribution. In solidarity, we have to see how sustainability and sufficiency depend upon each other. We have to both "till and keep the garden"—to draw earth's bounty carefully and share it equitably. To come to these realizations and act upon them is to journey toward eco-justice.

The articles that follow elaborate upon the values and the vision of eco-justice and their implications for policy and practice. In the commentary that accompanies them and in my concluding chapter, it is important to keep in view the rough and rocky character of the road upon which we travel.

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The obstacles to eco-justice are powerful, formidable, deeply rooted and entrenched. This has become increasingly apparent over the years of the Eco-Justice Project and the publication of the journal. To note the original publication dates of the articles will help to show that only as we sought to move toward eco-justice could we come to grasp the monumental difficulty of effecting the societal changes in thinking, valuing, policy making and daily living that eco-justice requires. We travel on a rocky road toward a sustainable sufficiency for all, and we have a long, hard way to go.

Notes

1. Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørge Randers, and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

2. We took the word "eco-justice" with the meaning given to it, a few years earlier, as an outcome of a notable effort at the national level of the American Baptist Churches to relate the evangelical Christian faith to the contemporary situation. Owen D. Owens gave an account of the origin of the word in a 1999 paper entitled "Choose Life." Jitsuo Morikawa, who in 1956 became secretary for evangelism in the American Baptist Home Mission Societies, started a program to train Christian lay people to be agents of the transformation of the major institutions that shape society, for the sake of justice and liberation. In the 1960s Morikawa headed up a sweeping reorganization of the Home Mission Societies (a name changed later to National Ministries). He directed an intensive study to collect data on the major institutions and to identify the leading social trends, and thus to determine the contemporary context of the church's mission. Heading the list of trends were several having to do either with ecology or with justice. Owen Owens, a staff associate in the reorganization process, argued that there could be no choice between ecology and justice, or between nature and history. Another staff person, Richard Jones, coined the word *eco-justice* to mean both ecological wholeness and social justice. Out of the reorganization, the American Baptist Board of National Ministries in 1972 adopted the goal of "structural change of institutions toward ecological wholeness and social justice at their points of intersection."

3. Norman J. Faramelli's article, "Ecological Responsibility and Economic Justice" in the *Andover Newton Quarterly* 11 (November 1970), contributed to my new awareness of the need to connect ecology and economics.

4. William E. Gibson and Earl B. Arnold contributed to *A Covenant Group for Lifestyle Assessment* and to *Shalom Connections in Personal and Congregational Life*, edited by Dieter T. Hessel (Ellenwood, Ga.: Alternatives, 1981). Gibson's published articles include: "Eco-Justice: New Perspective for a Time of Turning," Dieter T. Hessel, ed., *For Creation's Sake:*

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Preaching, Ecology and Justice (Philadelphia: Geneva Press, 1985); "An Order in Crisis and the Declaration of New Things," Robert L. Stivers, ed., *Reformed Faith and Economics* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1989); "Global Warming as a Theological-Ethical Concern," Dieter T. Hessel, ed., *After Nature's Revolt: Eco-Justice and Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992); "Eco-Justice and the Reality of God," *Church and Society*, July/August 1996; "The Obstacles to Changing Course," *Church and Society*, January/February 1997; and "The Sustainability Factor and the Work of God in Our Time," *Earth Letter*, November 1998. Arnold's include: "Changing Our Lifestyles, Changing Our World," Nadine Hundertmark, ed., *Pro-Earth* (New York: Friendship Press, 1985); and "The Solid Waste Crisis," *Church and Society*, March/April 1990.

5. I do not know which member of the team that worked on launching the journal came up with Kazantzakos's poem, or whether what we had was the entire poem or part of a longer one. I have tried unsuccessfully to locate the poem.

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