

Earth Letter

EARTH MINISTRY • CARING FOR ALL CREATION

The Wisdom of our Grandmothers

by LeeAnne Beres



The last time I visited Barbados was in 1996 when I traveled there with my husband, Ken, and his family for Christmas. So far south and east in the Caribbean Sea that its closest mainland neighbor is Venezuela, Barbados was originally settled by the Arawak Indians, who are believed to have either abandoned the island or to have been decimated by the more powerful Carib Indians prior to the arrival of European explorers in the early 1500s. Although the Portuguese gave Barbados its name (Los Barbados means “the bearded ones,” after a shaggy native fig tree), the island wasn’t re-inhabited until 1625 with the arrival of the British. The British Crown ruled Barbados for over three hundred years until the island achieved independence in 1966.

But we were not headed to Barbados for a history lesson. Nor, as you might expect, were we there to simply loll on the beach and soak up the uniquely Bajan culture – although that was certainly on the agenda.

The main purpose of our visit was to spend the holidays with Ken’s “Grandma Nancy” who had lived in Barbados for nearly thirty years. In one of those inexplicable family traditions, she was called Grandma Nancy by everyone in the family, even though she was Grandma only to a few and her given name was Margaret. It was my first time meeting her and I was a bit nervous being the new one in the family and the only significant other on the trip. Ken was her favorite grandson (since he was the only boy of her five grandchildren, she could get away with saying that), so the question in my mind was whether I would measure up to her expectations, whether she would think I was a “keeper”.



I am blessed to have been raised by my mother and her mother, so I had the benefit of knowing a thing or two

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Earth Ministry is evolving and this evolution is evident in its new mission statement: **To inspire and mobilize the Christian community to play a leadership role in building a just and sustainable future.**

IN THIS ISSUE

This issue focuses on “lessons from Katrina.” If September 11, 2001 is emblazoned in the mind of America as the day we lost our sense of invulnerability to attack, then August 29, 2005 should stand as the day mainstream America began to see the intimate interconnections between environmental issues on the one hand and poverty, race, and privilege on the other. In New Orleans, while the wealthy and middle class were able to drive to safety, the poor were left to fend for themselves as best they could. Decades of efforts to channel the Mississippi River (to fuel our industrial dreams) were washed away. So were our illusions of equity – in this land which claims to treat “all men as created equal”. Lessons – particularly cruel lessons – present the opportunity to see ourselves and our world afresh, and to “amend our ways”.

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GOINGS-ON AT EARTH MINISTRY

WE WELCOME ANNE AUMELL

Anne, our Membership and Development Manager, is our newest employee. She is a native Seattleite and an avid hiker with her husband of 20 years, Joe, and their two sons (Silas, 14 and Jackson, 8). She is a Roman Catholic and a Master of Divinity candidate in the School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University. Reared as a non-denominational evangelical Christian, her theology has always been central to her daily life. She believes that “we Christians are called to turn our hearts to all of Creation.” At Earth Ministry, Anne will work with our Colleagues (congregational activists), support the Caring for All Creation Program, and do some speaking engagements. We feel blessed to have her as part of our staff.



DOES GOD EXPECT US TO BE ENVIRONMENTALISTS?

Sunday afternoon, November 6th, Earth Ministry joined with nine other sponsors of a gathering at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Bellevue, Washington. The gathering highlighted the faith community's role in environmental activism. The main presentation, “Does God Expect Us to be Environmentalists?”, was offered by Dr. Loretta Jancoski, Director of the Center for Water Policy and Ethics at Seattle University and Board member of Earth Ministry. She said, in part: “Christian environmentalists know that acting on behalf of justice and peace for ALL of Creation is their privilege and responsibility, because it all comes from God and God is present in every part of it.” LeeAnne Beres and Michael Schut represented Earth Ministry on the program.

OUR CELEBRATION OF ST. FRANCIS

On October 8th liturgical dancer extraordinaire, Betsy Beckman, joined by her troupe of dancers, joyously and dramatically presented the story of the evolution of the Universe from the big bang to the present – a truly moving and powerful experience. Then LeeAnne Beres, Executive Director, offered brief remarks. Earth Ministry's Founding Director, the Reverend Carla Pryne, concluded the Celebration with an engaging and inspirational talk on the life of St. Francis of Assisi and his lasting impact on the Church through the last six centuries.

COLLEAGUE CONSULTATION

On November 5th, twenty-five Earth Ministry Colleagues (congregational activists) gathered at Seattle University for the fall consultation. Mary Rose, Colleague from University Congregational Church in Seattle, gave a PowerPoint presentation of the plans for the Multifaith Creation Festival, to be held at Saint Mark's Cathedral, May 19 – 21, 2006. Earth Ministry is one of the central sponsors of this festival. Colleagues spent time discussing the kinds of workshops their churches might be interested in, and the ways they might highlight their congregational success stories.

FALL FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

Each year Earth Ministry's primary financial support comes from you, our members. If you want our work to continue – to inspire and mobilize the Christian community to enact its responsibility to care for all Creation – please support our ministry. Thank you.

You can make your contribution online at www.earthministry.org; click on “Order Online” on the left side of your screen.



THE WISDOM OF OUR GRANDMOTHERS

Continued from page 1

about grandmothers. My grandmother Miriam (known by her nickname Mimsie), gave up her retirement years to help raise my sister and me, and had lived with us since I was three years old. Mimsie shaped much of who I am today, the lessons of her life freely shared. The valedictorian of her high school class, she was unable to attend college due to lack of funds so she taught me the value of an education. She went to work at age sixteen and imparted a fierce work ethic, along with a strong sense of duty and responsibility to others. Having survived both a financially meager childhood and the Great Depression, Mimsie knew full well the value of the food we eat and the resources we use. “Waste not, want not” was a common refrain around our house.

In this age where the phrase “family values” is bandied about almost as a weapon, it’s become clear to me that true family values are ones that give us the tools to live in harmony with all of Creation. My grandmother modeled this in her daily life. In addition to supporting programs for the poor after her own situation changed, she put out feed for the birds in the cold Wisconsin winter and cared for our collie, Angus, as a member of the family. She taught me and my sister to be aware of our surroundings and pick up litter that others had left behind. Together, she and my mother

introduced us to hiking and camping and gave us a deep appreciation of the wonders of nature.

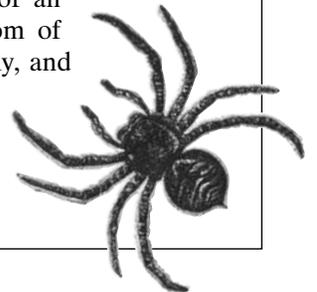
In thinking back to that first trip to Barbados nearly 10 years ago, I shouldn’t have been worried. Grandma Nancy welcomed me with open arms, and reminded me in many ways of Mimsie. The values she shared were different, her life lessons more about generosity, the strength of family, not being afraid to do what is right, and keeping a good attitude in the face of heartbreak and hardship. Widowed three times, Grandma Nancy knew how to pick herself up and start over. Her first husband, my husband’s biological grandfather, was killed in World War II. In the 60’s, after her second husband passed away (he adopted Ken’s father and passed on the Beres family name), Grandma Nancy took over his heating and air-conditioning business in Cleveland, making a living as a woman in a man’s world. In the early 70’s, she followed her high school sweetheart to Barbados, where their dream ended tragically when her third husband died of cancer only a few months later. When I met her, Grandma Nancy had given love one more chance, making a life in Barbados with a British expatriate with an interest in golf and photography. What I remember most about her at that time is that she opened her heart and her home to me unconditionally, and she made me feel like I had always belonged as part of her family. As I grew to know her, she became *my* Grandma Nancy too.

These unrelated women and their seemingly unrelated stories unite as a whole in two lives well lived, and serve as a basis for my inspiration today. In my work to protect and restore the natural world, I draw on their legacy: hard work, perseverance, a belief that we should all give something back, and when times are tough, face it with a touch of fearlessness tinged with humor. Just as my faith gives me the foundation for a vision of a whole and vibrant Creation, my grandmothers give me the tools to make that vision a reality.

Grandma Nancy maintained a keen interest in what was going on in our lives in the years that followed that initial visit. As her health deteriorated, she made the difficult decision in 1999 to leave her long-time home in Barbados and move to Arizona to be closer to her daughter. My grandmother Mimsie passed away earlier that same year, leaving a terrible void in our lives that was only slightly ameliorated by our ability to visit Grandma Nancy more easily in her new home, which we did every other year. Those holidays and times together are some of my fondest memories.

This Christmas, my husband’s family is planning one last trip to Barbados – this time to say goodbye to a wonderful woman in a place that she loved, for Grandma Nancy has now passed away as well. As we return her ashes to the Earth, we pray that the future of all Creation will benefit from the wisdom of our grandmothers: be kind, love family, and remember that family can be as big and wide as we choose to define it.

We miss you, Grandma Nancy. †



Hurricanes and Global Warming

by Bill Chameides



Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are a wake-up call for the United States, providing a grim reminder of how vulnerable our nation's peoples, infrastructure and economy can be to natural disasters. As we contemplate rebuilding the regions devastated by Katrina, it behooves us to consider the underlying causes of the disaster and what can be done to minimize the likelihood of similar disasters in the future.

Storms have been pummeling the Gulf and East Coast of the United States for millennia. However, the evidence suggests that human society is affecting the environment in ways that contribute to the destructive effects of hurricanes in general and Katrina in particular. One major contributor, no doubt, is the growing concentration of people and homes along coastal areas subject to hurricane landfall. Another is the levee and flood control system emplaced along the Mississippi River. By limiting the amount of silt that gets deposited along the Delta, these systems have caused the loss of wetlands and barrier islands, which protect coastal areas from the full brunt of a hurricane's storm surge, as well as the general sinking (or subsidence) of the surrounding coastal lands making them more vulnerable to flooding. This is an issue of critical importance and needs to be addressed in a comprehensive and timely manner.

GLOBAL WARMING AND HURRICANE DESTRUCTIVE POWER

While it is not possible to determine to what extent global warming may have contributed to the destruction wrought by a single storm such as Katrina, the evidence is mounting that tropical storms have already become more destructive as a result of global warming, and that global warming will be an increasingly significant factor exacerbating the destruction caused by hurricanes in the coming decades.

The energy that drives tropical storms and hurricanes comes from the warm surface waters of the ocean that underlie the storm. Because sea surface temperatures increase with global warming, scientists have long predicted that global warming will lead to more intense storms. The questions that remained to be answered were: "When would the increase in intensity first appear?" and "By how much?" Two new papers, one appearing in *Nature* and the other in *Science*, suggest that the answers are "they have already" and "by quite a lot."... [These articles suggest that] global

warming may very well have played a role in adding to Katrina's fury. More importantly, it seems likely that highly destructive, Katrina-like storms will become more common if global warming is allowed to continue unabated.

GLOBAL WARMING AND SEA-LEVEL RISE

Global warming contributes to rising sea levels in two ways: (1) through thermal expansion – as the ocean warms the water expands; and (2) by increasing the amount of water in the ocean – as atmospheric temperatures increase, glaciers melt and flow into the ocean. Both of these processes cause the ocean to rise up toward and onto the coastal margins, in effect increasing the sea level. As the sea level rises, coastal communities, in turn, become more vulnerable to storm surges from hurricanes because (1) the storm surges begin from a higher level; and (2) rising sea level accelerates the erosion of wetlands, barrier islands and beaches that would otherwise act as a buffer against a storm surge.

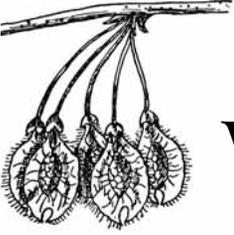
CONCLUSION

A key lesson learned from Katrina is that although there is little we can do to prevent natural disasters such as hurricanes, we can act to minimize our vulnerability and limit the extent to which human activities contribute to their destructive potential. There is compelling evidence that the emissions of global warming pollutants such as carbon



dioxide are causing hurricanes to be more destructive and increasing the vulnerability of coastal communities to these storms. Katrina-like events could become far more common and more widespread unless the emissions of global warming pollutants are capped.†

This article was taken from "Hurricanes and Global Warming: Lessons from Katrina", September 27, 2005, www.environmentaldefense.org/article.cfm?contentID=4792.



When There's No More to Say, It's Time to Feel

by Joan Chittister

This article first appeared in the September 9, 2005 issue of the *National Catholic Reporter*.

“**T**his world is a comedy to those who think,” Horace Walpole wrote, “a tragedy to those who feel.” He wasn’t talking about the situation in New Orleans – but he could have been.

What more can possibly be written about the hurricane in New Orleans that has not already been printed. But how can a human being write or think about much of anything else right now. There is something about the situation that simply dominates the soul – as well it should; as well it is.

We know the information: a hurricane came; levees broke; eighty percent of the city was inundated by flood waters anywhere from four feet to twenty feet deep; and hardest hit was the Ninth Ward, a low income area of African-Americans who did not have access to the transportation they needed to flee the city.

We know, too, that New Orleans begged for help from the National Guard. CNN got there, ABC News got there, MSNBC got there – all of them within hours of the storm – but it took the National Guard five days to arrive, long after the available food and water had run out, long after the corpses and feces and chemicals and oil had turned the city into a toxic swamp.

Finally, we know that the city is now closed down, become a ghost town, turned into a gaping wound on the U.S. psyche.

And, oh yes, we also know that in addition to the dead yet to be counted, there are now 485,000 refugees out there, being shunted from place to place, looking for housing, food, jobs, and families.

And that’s where the thinking stops. At 485,000 refugees.

That’s where the feelings – that other kind of thinking – the tragedy, takes over.

The thinkers say that the city will be dried out in so many days. The Superdome will be torn down – in so many days.

An inquiry will be conducted – in so many days. Money will be given to relief agencies for the support of the homeless – in so many days. And all of that, if even any appreciable part of it is true, is fine. But that’s where the comedy – the story with a happy ending – ends.

The calendar of recovery does not mention the tragedy of what can

never be recovered: the old culture, the old city, the old haunts, the old living places, the old music, the old certainties, the old security for any of us.

Little by little, the feelings begin to seep out like water in a leechbed from one end of the country to the other. Feelings – theirs and ours – begin to bubble up and spill over and inundate an entire nation of people once invulnerable, once invincible, once sure that we were just a little lower than the gods, now become rudely aware that we are earthlings of the earthiest order.

Then, feelings – that other kind of thinking – just won’t go away. First one, then another, struggles to the surface and threatens to overwhelm us again:

Confusion: How is it that a country that is one flight away from Mars couldn’t get troops into the city to keep order, couldn’t send 100 policemen with bullhorns into the Superdome to give some semblance of organization and dignity to people who had swum for their lives to get there, couldn’t drive a fleet of buses to a staging area to pick up the old men, the sick women, the little children from the 50,000 households in New Orleans that do not own a car?

Have we come to the point where people count less in this country than inflating our international ego with space travel that eats up money and brings back rocks?

Anger: Failing to find nineteen lonely, obsessed, fanatics out of a haystack of 6 billion people before they have a chance to use our own commercial airliners to blow up the World Trade Center is one thing. But failing to have 25,000 rubber boats available to evacuate people from a Category 4-5 hurricane that you can see coming straight at you for four full days before it hits is entirely another. For years New Orleans has feared “the big one”, expected the big one, understood the implications of being hit by the big one. But we weren’t ready? Why not?!

We’re told that we’re doing everything “right” in Iraq? After 2,000 U.S. dead and 14,000 wounded, a country teetering on the brink of civil war and the creation of a nest of terrorists, we say we’ve made no mistakes, we have no regrets. If this is a demonstration of how “right” we do things now, how can we possibly justify what we have done to people there?

Frustration: How can we sit quietly in front of television sets in our comfortable, dry, air-conditioned living rooms and watch other Americans float by amid debris, see corpses hanging over garbage bags, gasp while old people are hoisted into helicopters like bags of rice in a barn? How do we help? Where do we go to help? How can anyone help this!



On our computers we get the message: "The Los Angeles Services Homeless Authority is expecting approximately 20,000 evacuees from Hurricane Katrina to come to Los Angeles.... There are currently 90,000 homeless people living in Los Angeles.... Our resources will be stretched thin. Please donate water, food, toilet paper, storage bins, toothpaste, large suitcases." In the United States of Affluence?

We're told one day that Congress has appropriated \$10 billion in aid. The next day we're told we need to find another \$50 billion to even scratch the surface of the amount of help needed.

Last year the U.S. domestic services budget was cut so taxes for the wealthy could be cut even more and the war in Iraq could go on. What public services and infrastructures and social programs will pay for these things now? Where will we get the money we say we don't have? And where will we put it? Into bombs or into biscuits for babies?

While we are trying to clean up rubble in our own country and calling it tragic, we are creating it in another and calling it noble. "U.S. Red Cross tracks 94,000 Katrina Evacuees," the first headline says; "Marine Jets Bomb Two Iraqi Bridges,"

the second headline says to remind us that while our own refugees are being forced from their homes, the people we are making refugees elsewhere are streaming out of cities not our own.

"This is no time to point fingers," the administration says. True. But the time is coming.

From where I stand in a country that refuses to sign global warming treaties, that routinely dismisses ecological data as unimportant, that refuses to admit the scope of the disaster we ourselves have launched elsewhere, it is time to wake up. It is time to conduct our future elections on a comparative study of issues and plans and projects that will make these tragic situations impossible rather than on Madison Avenue images and "good 'ol boy" politics.

If we don't wake up soon, the real tragedy is yet to come and then it will be too late for any of us to either think or feel. †



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Ha Shem*

by Karen Baker-Fletcher

Hurricane
Why
Hurricane
Sigh
A touch on
Our shoulders
In early
July
At first
So dry
Then so humid
Weather awry
The birds all timid
In shade of trees
Then diving like turtles
Without grace or ease
Dipping low
For dark and cool
Seeking oasis
In tepid pool
Past breeding
And nesting
Just wrestling
With heat
Past season
To Season
Black and
Orange
Webbed feet

Sense
Adam's empire's
The reason
For warnings
And warnings
In morning's
First "Hi"
Such sorrow
Little regret
For ignoring
Heaven's eye
Before emperors
In ties
Butt naked with lies
Muted earth's cries
In ascent to hell's throne
Deep in the bog of
Imperialist dung
Plaguing
Peasant
Pietas'
Hearts
All flung and wrung
By the tragic folly
of empire's feast
With blasphemous prayers
Mocking the least
Hailing techno whizzer's of Oz
Flaccid grey-skinned priests

Passing numbers for gods
While laboring serfs grieve
The debris on God's altars
While creation groans
With constant plea
From bayou to bay
And from bay to the sea
And the winds prophesy:
What a meager repentance
Such blasphemous offerings
What mocking remembrance
Of secret waters rippling with mirth
Spirit hovering over depths meeting earth
Swirling wind and love
Coursing down from above
Panting, then pulsing, then hearing
Sophia's hymn
At the first cry of birth
I Am
Alpha
And
Omega
Thus speaks
Ha Shem.

*Ha Shem is a Hebrew word used to avoid pronouncing the name of God when it appears in the Hebrew text.

This poem is from Karen Baker-Fletcher's forthcoming book: *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective*, by Chalice Press. Copyright © 2005 Karen Baker-Fletcher. Used by permission of the author.

Christian America and Katrina: Bambi Meets Godzilla

by Bill McKibben

A SNAPSHOT OF CHRISTIAN AMERICA

Three quarters of Americans believe the Bible teaches that “God helps those who help themselves.” That is, three out of four Americans believe that this uber-American idea, a notion at the core of our current individualist politics and culture, which was in fact uttered by Ben Franklin, actually appears in Holy Scripture. The thing is, not only is Franklin’s wisdom not biblical; it’s counter-biblical. Few ideas could be further from the gospel message, with its radical summons to love of neighbor. On this essential matter, most Americans – most American Christians – are simply wrong, as if 75 percent of American scientists believed that Newton proved gravity causes apples to fly up.

America is a place saturated in Christian identity, but is it *Christian*? This is not a matter of angels dancing on the heads of pins. Christ was pretty specific about what he had in mind for his followers. What if we chose some simple criterion – say, giving aid to the poorest people – as a reasonable proxy for Christian behavior? After all, in the days before his crucifixion, when Jesus summed up his message for his disciples, he said the way you could tell the righteous from the damned was by whether they’d fed the hungry, slaked the thirsty, clothed the naked, welcomed the stranger, and visited the prisoner. What would we find then?

In 2004, as a share of our economy, we ranked second to last, after Italy, among developed countries in government foreign aid. Per capita we each provide fifteen cents a day in official development assistance to poor countries. And it’s not because we were giving to private charities for relief work instead. Such funding increases our average daily donation by just six pennies, to twenty-one cents. It’s also not because Americans were too busy taking care of their own; nearly 18 percent of American children lived in poverty (compared with, say, 8 percent in Sweden). In fact, by pretty much any measure of caring for the least among us you want to propose – childhood nutrition, infant mortality, access to preschool – we come in nearly last among the rich nations, and often by a wide margin. The point is not just that (as everyone already knows) the American nation trails badly in all these categories; it’s that the overwhelmingly *Christian* American nation trails badly in all these categories, categories to which Jesus paid particular attention. And it’s not as if the numbers are getting better: the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported last year that the number of households that were “food insecure with hunger”

had climbed more than 26 percent between 1999 and 2003.

Love your neighbor as yourself: although its rhetorical power has been dimmed by repetition, that is a radical notion, perhaps the most radical notion possible. Especially since Jesus, in all his teachings, made it very clear who the neighbor you were supposed to love was: the poor person, the sick person, the naked person, the hungry person. The last shall be made first; turn the other cheek; a rich person aiming for heaven is like a camel trying to walk through the eye of a needle. On and on and on – a call for nothing less than a radical, voluntary, and effective reordering of power relationships, based on the principle of love.

I confess, even as I write these words, to a feeling close to embarrassment. Because in public we tend not to talk about such things. But remember the overwhelming connection between America and Christianity; what Jesus meant is the most deeply potent political, cultural, social question. To ignore it, or leave it to the bullies and the salesmen of the televangelist sects, means to walk away from a central battle over American identity. At the moment, the idea of Jesus has been hijacked by people with a series of causes that do not reflect his teachings. The Bible is a long book, and even the Gospels have plenty in them, some of it seemingly contradictory and hard to puzzle out. But love your neighbor as yourself – not do unto others as you would have them do unto you, but *love your neighbor as yourself* – will suffice as a gloss. There is no disputing the centrality of this message, nor is there any disputing how easy it is to ignore that message. Because it is so counterintuitive, Christians have had to keep repeating it to themselves right from the start. Consider Paul, for instance, instructing the church at Galatea: “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment,” he wrote. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

American churches, by and large, have done a pretty good job of loving the neighbor in the next pew. A pastor can spend all Sunday talking about the Rapture Index, but if his congregation is thriving you can be assured he’s spending the other six days visiting people in the hospital, counseling couples, and sitting

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up with grieving widows. All this human connection is important. But if the theology makes it harder to love the neighbor a little farther away – particularly the poor and the weak – then it's a problem. And the dominant theologies of the moment do just that. They undercut Jesus, muffle his hard words, deaden his call, and in the end silence him. In fact, the soft-focus consumer gospel of the suburban megachurches

is a perfect match for emergent conservative economic notions about personal responsibility instead of collective action. Privatize Social Security? Keep health care for people who can afford it? File those under “God helps those who help themselves.”

But straight is the path and narrow is the way. The Gospel is too radical for any culture larger than the Amish to ever come close to realizing; in demanding a departure from selfishness it conflicts with all our current desires. Even the first time around, judging by the reaction, the Gospels were pretty unwelcome news to an awful lot of people. There is not going to be a modern-day return to the church of the early believers, holding all things in common – that's not what I'm talking about. Taking seriously the actual message of Jesus, though, should serve at least to moderate the greed and violence that mark this culture. It's hard to imagine a con much more audacious than making Christ the front man for a program of tax cuts for the rich or war in Iraq. If some modest part of the 85 percent of us who are Christians woke up to that fact, then the world might change.

It is possible, I think. Yes, the mainline Protestant churches that supported civil rights and opposed the war in Vietnam are mostly locked in a dreary decline as their congrega-

tions dwindle and their elders argue endlessly about gay clergy and same-sex unions. And the Catholic Church, for most of its American history a sturdy exponent of a “love your neighbor” theology, has been weakened, too, its hierarchy increasingly motivated by a single-issue focus on abortion. Plenty of vital congregations are doing great good works – they're the ones that have nurtured me – but they aren't where the challenge will arise; they've grown shy about talking about Jesus, more

comfortable with the language of sociology and politics. More and more it's Bible-quoting Christians, like Wallis's *Sojourners* movement and that Baptist seminary graduate Bill Moyers, who are carrying the fight.

Since the days of Constantine, emperors and rich men have sought to co-opt the teachings of Jesus. As in so many areas of our increasingly market-tested lives, the co-opters – the TV men, the politicians, the Christian “interest groups” – have found a way to make each of us complicit in that travesty, too. They have invited us to subvert the church of Jesus even as we celebrate it. With their help we have made golden calves of ourselves – become a nation of terrified, self-obsessed idols. It works, and it may well keep working for a long time to come. When Americans hunger for selfless love and are fed only love of self, they will remain hungry, and too often hungry people just come back for more of the same.

KATRINA: AN ILL WIND

If the images of New York skyscrapers collapsed in heaps of ash were the end of one story – the United States safe on its isolated continent from the turmoil of the world – then the picture of the sodden Superdome with its peeling roof marks the beginning of the next story, the one that will dominate politics in the coming decades of this century: America befuddled about how to cope with a planet suddenly turned unstable and unpredictable.

Over and over during that week, people said that the scenes from the convention center, the highway overpasses, and the other suddenly infamous Crescent City venues, didn't “look like America,” that they seemed instead to be straight from the Third World. That was almost literally accurate, for poor, black New Orleans (whose life had never previously been of any interest to most of the larger public or, for that matter, the American Church) is not so different from other poor and black parts of the world: its infant mortality and life expectancy rates, its educational achievement statistics, mirroring scores of African and Latin American enclaves. But it was accurate in another way, too, one full of portent for the future. A decade ago, environmental researcher Norman Myers began trying to add up the number of humans at risk of losing their homes from global warming. He looked at all the obvious places – coastal China, India, Bangladesh, the tiny island states of the Pacific and Indian oceans, the Nile delta, Mozambique, on and on – and predicted that by 2050, it was entirely possible that 150 million people could be “environmental refugees”, forced from their homes by rising waters.

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Rescue Came from the Grass Roots

by Bruce Dixon

The photographs in this article are from Mobile, Alabama.

From her Atlanta home, former Gulf Coast resident Latosha Brown and a few friends watched the man-made catastrophe unfold in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Blacks and whites see the world through different lenses. Whites are far more likely to reject the notion that racial inequality remains a major problem in America and that race plays a part in government response to emergencies. Although black and white hurricane survivors find themselves in similar circumstances (displacement from their homes) because of institutional discrimination, blacks may face different experiences and challenges than whites in rebuilding their lives, homes, businesses, institutions, and communities.

Katrina struck a region that has a disproportionately large share of African Americans and poor people. For example, though African Americans make up only 12 percent of the United States population, New Orleans is nearly 68 percent black and 46.3 percent of the population of Mobile, Alabama, is black.

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“We kept expecting to see the National Guard, government, Red Cross – somebody do something. The idea that our leaders would allow people to fend for themselves two, three, five days with no food, water, medicine or help from outside – we just couldn’t get our minds around it.

“People were dy-

ing by the hundreds in New Orleans, and folks we knew in Mississippi, in Alabama, were hurt, missing, and homeless or hungry. You’ve got two choices when you see something like that. Choice one is to feel defeated. Choice two is to be pro-active and do something about it. There were about six of us in my living room at that moment, all movement vets. We called around to see what we could make happen ourselves.

“The first folks to send a couple of vans of food and supplies were from TOPS (The Ordinary Peoples Society), a prison ministry in Dothan, Alabama founded by Rev. Kenneth Glasgow and staffed by ex-offenders. They organized food from a food bank, pooled their money to get additional goods and moved it to Mobile [on the Gulf Coast] where they connected with Paul Jackson, also a former prisoner, of One For Life, another organization of formerly incarcerated brothers. In Mobile, One for Life distributed the supplies where the need was greatest while TOPS went back to Dothan for more. That’s why we tell everybody now that it was felons who were the first to feed, the first to respond to need, the first to get up and do something. They didn’t



wait for permission or for a contract. That's real leadership."

[Both Glasgow's and Jackson's groups] are now part of a network of black civic and religious organizations that have fought for years to restore the right to vote to over 200,000 former prisoners in Alabama, most of them African American men. "We started going into the projects," said Glasgow. "We went to Orange Grove and other places, some where the water had reached second floor windows. They found small and medium-sized black churches in the affected area who also hadn't been contacted by the Red Cross or any government agency but who'd mobilized their own members to begin feeding their neighborhoods. The ex-offenders began sharing their supplies, their contacts, and their information about unmet needs with these community partners. By the second food-and-water trip south, the former prisoners were bringing families out of flooded and devastated areas back to safety and temporary housing. Soon the ex-felons were driving in shifts with vans moving both ways around the clock.

Meanwhile, in Atlanta, Brown and her friends imagined that by their second or third trip south, local or federal officials, the National Guard, or someone in authority would be on the scene to feed people, to evacuate the sick, homeless and injured, restore essential services, assess the damage and generally do what governments of modern and civilized societies are expected to do. But in Gulf Coast Alabama and Mississippi, just as in New Orleans, it didn't happen.

"When we realized this wouldn't be over in a couple days, we hit the phones again," Brown said. "We asked for help from community and civic organizations we'd worked with, from churches we knew, from businesses and individuals – and doors just flew open. It was amazing. One friend was able to get \$10,000 worth of food donated, but it sat there all morning because we had no



way to move it. A brother in the community, a truck driver, stepped up and volunteered to get it down to the Gulf Coast for gas money. Paul Jackson down in Mobile got us a warehouse to receive goods being sent, and somebody's supervisor on the job lent a forklift and driver. We found more vans in other places, and on the fourth day our group in Selma working with a local church opened up a shelter for a hundred people. Every truck and van that carried supplies down brought families out on the way back, including a number of Cambodian and Vietnamese families...."

"The black churches tapped their own networks," said Jackson. "Donations, supplies and volunteers came from churches all over Mississippi and Alabama. We [even] got help from churches in Minnesota, Maryland, and Virginia. They arrived in black neighborhoods before anybody from FEMA or the Red Cross. Still, even after the arrival of official help we kept finding pockets of mostly black people bypassed or ignored by FEMA and the Red Cross."

This should have been no surprise. Much of the National Guard was in Iraq. FEMA never demanded that Red Cross officials expand their personal network of contacts across the tracks into Black Biloxi, Black Mobile, Black Gulfport and Black Pascagoula. So, well-stocked and well-supplied Red Cross operations sat in white churches only a short distance from predomi-



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Hurricane Katrina has left environmental contamination in Gulf Coast communities that will have to be cleaned up. In the New Orleans area alone, an estimated 22 million tons of debris must be cleaned up and 145,000 cars ruined by hurricane floodwater will need to be disposed of. How, when, and to what extent contaminated neighborhoods are cleaned up is a major environmental justice concern for African American communities.

Where hurricane debris and waste ends up is another issue. Black communities in the South, as documented in *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, are dotted with landfills, toxic waste dumps, and hazardous waste disposal sites. It is important that government officials not repeat the mistakes made in 1965 with debris from Hurricane Betsy that was disposed in an African American area – which later became the Agricultural Street Landfill Superfund site community.

Katrina has created a New Orleans “government in exile.” The city’s elected officials – a majority of whom are African Americans – including the mayor, city council, school board, and judges, are scattered in Baton Rouge and surrounding parishes. Its citizenry who elected them are scattered from Maine to Utah with no idea when they can return home. Clean-up contracts and rebuilding decisions are being made without the input, advice, or vote from duly elected New Orleans officials and citizens.

Since Katrina, the African American Leadership Project, though scattered across the country, developed its own response to the disaster. This plan, presented to the Congressional Black Caucus 2005 Annual Legislative Conference held in Washington, DC, recommends that the hundreds of billions in federal resources be targeted to improve human development and capacity, rebuild the physical infrastructure, and rebuild the institutional systems. The group outlined some broad principles, a framework, values orientation, and a “Citizen Bill of Rights” that they would like to see used to guide the Rebuilding, Reconstruction, and Recovery process in New Orleans. Katrina survivors are fighting for equal treatment and equal protection of their right to clean air, clean land, and clean water.

Finally, Katrina survivors have a right to self-determination. All displaced persons should be allowed to return to their home and neighborhood and allowed to exercise their democratic rights guaranteed under our constitution. It is imperative that evacuees from hurricane-damaged areas, who are scattered across the United States, be allowed to vote in elections and participate in decision-making that affects their communities.

The sidebar information is from “Legacy of Unfairness: Why Some Americans Get Left Behind”, by Robert D. Bullard and Beverly H. Wright. The full text can be seen at: www.ejrc.cau.edu/Exec%20Summary%20Legacy.html.

RESCUE CAME FROM THE GRASS ROOTS

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nantly black areas. By September 15th this grassroots effort had moved \$100,000 worth of food and supplies to affected areas, gained access to eight buses, evacuated over a thousand people and helped supply and run four shelters. Through contacts with realtors and builders they were arranging temporary and permanent housing for families, and funneling volunteers from dozens of churches to affected areas to assist in cleanup. A week later they secured the cooperation of the National Medical Association, the premiere organization of African American physicians, to provide medical services to some evacuees and persons in affected areas.

“We call ourselves ‘SOS After Katrina,’” said Latosha Brown. “That stands for ‘Saving Our Selves,’ cause if we don’t who will?” We know taking care of citizens is still the responsibility of government, and we vow to stick around for the political fight to make that happen.”†

This article first appeared on the web page *The Black Commentator*, September 22, 2005: www.blackcommentator.com. Copyright © The Black Commentator. Used by permission.



CHRISTIAN AMERICA AND KATRINA: BAMBI MEETS GODZILLA

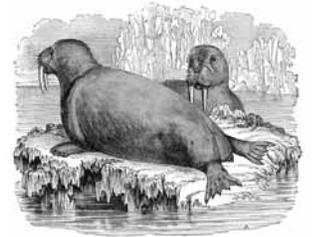
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That's more than the number of political refugees sent scurrying by the bloody century we've just endured. Try to imagine, that is, the chaos that attends busing 15,000 people from one football stadium to another in the richest nation on Earth, and then multiply it by four orders of magnitude and re-situate your thoughts in the poorest nations on earth. And then try to imagine doing it over and over again – probably without the buses.

Because so far, even as newspapers and websites fill with accusations about the scandalous lack of planning that led to the collapse of the levees in New Orleans, almost no one is addressing the much larger problems: the scandalous lack of planning that has kept us from even beginning to address climate change, and the sad fact that global warming means the future will be full of just this kind of horror. Consider the first problem for just a minute. No single hurricane is “the result” of global warming. But a month before Katrina hit, MIT hurricane specialist Kerry Emmanuel published a landmark paper in the British science magazine *Nature* showing that tropical storms were now lasting half again as long and spinning winds 50 percent more powerful than just a few decades before. The only plausible cause: the ever-warmer tropical seas on which these storms thrive. Katrina, a Category 1 storm when it crossed Florida, roared to full life in the abnormally hot water of the Gulf of Mexico. It then punched its way into Louisiana and Mississippi – the latter a state now governed by Haley Barbour, who in an earlier incarnation as a GOP power broker and energy lobbyist helped persuade President Bush to renege on his promise to treat carbon dioxide as a pollutant.

So far, the United States has done exactly nothing even to try to slow the progress of climate change; we're emitting far more carbon than we were in 1988, when scientists issued their first prescient global warming warnings. Even if, at that moment, we'd started doing all that we could to overhaul our energy economy, we'd probably still be stuck with the one degree Fahrenheit increase in global average temperature that's already driving our current disruptions. Now scientists predict that without truly dramatic change in the very near future, we're likely to see the planet's mercury rise five degrees before this century is out. That is, five times more than we've seen so far. Which leads us to the second problem: for the ten thousand years of human civilization, we've relied on the planet's basic physical stability. Sure, there have been hurricanes and droughts and volcanoes and tsunamis, but averaged out across the Earth, it's been a remarkably stable run. If your grandparents inhabited a particular island, chances were that you could too. If you could grow corn in your field, you could pretty much count on your grandkids being able to do likewise. Those are now sucker's bets – that's what those predictions about environmental refugees really mean.

Here's another way of saying it: in the last century, we've seen change in human societies speed up to an almost unimaginable level, one that has stressed every part of our civilization. In this century, we're going to see the natural world change at the same kind of rate. That's what happens when you increase the amount of heat trapped in the atmosphere. That extra energy expresses itself in every way you can imagine: more wind, more evaporation, more rain, more melt, more...more...more. And there is no reason to think we can cope. Take New Orleans as an example. It is currently *pro forma* for politicians to announce that it will be rebuilt, and doubtless it will be. Once. But if hurricanes like Katrina go from once-in-a-century storms to once-in-a-decade-or-two storms, how many times are you going to rebuild it? Even in America there's not that kind of money – especially if you're also having to cope with, say, the effects on agriculture of more frequent and severe heat waves, and the effects on human health of the spread of mosquito-borne diseases like dengue fever and malaria, and so on *ad infinitum*. Not to mention the costs of converting our energy system to something less suicidal than fossil fuel, a task that becomes more expensive with every year that passes. Our rulers have insisted by both word and deed that the laws of physics and chemistry do not apply to us. That delusion will now start to vanish. Katrina marks Year One of our new calendar, the start of an age in which the physical world has flipped from sure and secure to volatile and unhinged. New Orleans doesn't look like the America we've lived in. But it very much resembles the planet we will inhabit the rest of our lives.

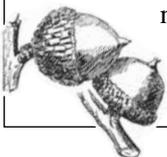


WINDS OF CHANGE

When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led poor African Americans out of their ghettos and onto the stage of mainstream media, America reluctantly opened her eyes. Change gradually followed. In our predominately white churches, the scales slowly fell from our eyes as we recognized the Christian moral authenticity of this cause. There is still much work to do to end racial prejudice (overt and covert), but racial justice is almost universally acknowledged as a moral concern today, even in churches of privilege.

In Moses' day it took ten successive plagues to get “governmental attention.” How many Katrina's will it take to capture the attention of our government? Or our American Church? Those of us reading this article are part of a larger movement. We have seen the handwriting on the wall. Like Job we have heard the voice from the whirlwind. We are the ones called to “speak the truth in the halls of power.” And in the House of God. We are the ones we've been waiting for. Now we have the wind at our back. †

Portions of this article first appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, August 2005. Copyright © 2005 by Bill McKibben. Used by permission of the author.



CALENDAR

DECEMBER, 2005 - FEBRUARY, 2006

For updated and more detailed information, please see our web site: www.earthministry.org/emcal.htm; or call (206) 632-2426. Please submit calendar items and congregational goings-on to Michael Schut at Earth Ministry, mschut@earthministry.org.

Earth Ministry Events & Co-sponsored Programs

“Climate Change – Questions You’ve Wanted to Ask; Solutions You Can be Part of”

Sunday, February 12, 7:00PM; Grace Episcopal Church, 8595 NE Day Rd, Bainbridge Island. For information call (206) 632-2426

This evening of education and conversation is co-sponsored by Grace Church. Dr. Gary Lagerloef, Senior Scientist of Earth and Space Research and Principal Investigator of the NASA Aquarius Mission, will provide an overview of the physical realities of climate change and results of the latest research. You’ll learn from Anne Aumell of Earth Ministry how the Christian community is responding to climate change and what role congregations can play in reversing its effects. A representative of Climate Solutions, a Seattle non-profit organization, has been invited to provide information on what individuals can do to make a difference. All are welcome to attend. For more information contact Marcia Lagerloef, Earth Ministry board member, at (206) 842-8942.



Episcopal Urban Caucus: “Weaving Together the Fabric of Justice”

February 22-25, 2006 in Seattle

The gathering will focus on issues of economic justice, ethnicity and native peoples, homelessness, and the environment in a time of learning, networking, worship and advocacy. The environment track features a visit and presentation by a representative of People for Puget Sound at a Duwamish River Superfund site; a tour of Georgetown Gospel Chapel, the country’s first Energy Star church and an Earth Ministry Greening Congregation; and a presentation by LeeAnne Beres, on how the Christian community can take a leadership role in building a just and sustainable future. Episcopalians interested in attending can call Pete Strimer of the Diocese of Olympia at (206) 325-4200 for information on how to register.



Save the date: Earth Ministry will co-sponsor a “Multifaith Creation Festival” with a number of other faith and environmental groups May 19 - 20, 2006 in Seattle

Other Events & Programs

Birds of Puget Sound: Fifty Years of Watching

People For Puget Sound’s Speaker Series, REI, 222 Yale Ave. N., Seattle, 7:00-9:00PM

Thursday, Feb. 2, 2006 - *Birds of Puget Sound*

Thursday, Mar. 2, 2006 - *Birds on Ice*

Thursday, Apr. 6, 2006 - *Reefer Madness*

Thursday, May 4, 2006 - *Spineless Wonders of Puget Sound*

Admission: \$8 in advance; \$10 at the door; \$2 discount for members and students. For reservations, purchase online (<http://pugetsound.org/index/siteevent-details-action/id.98>) or call Jenny Aunan (206) 382-7007.



Teen Winter Wilderness Expedition

Teen wilderness awareness school, ages 15-18; February 19-25, Duvall, WA

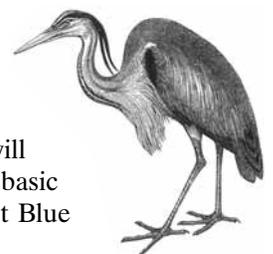
Snow Shoeing, Winter Skills and Forest Carnivore Tracking in the Cascade Range

\$745 (by 1/19; \$795 thereafter). Food, camping, and transportation included. Begins and ends in Duvall. For more information visit: <http://www.wildernessawareness.org/YouthProgTeenExpeditions.html>.

The Life of the Great Blue Heron

Adopt a Stream Foundation, December 16, 7:00PM, Ages 10 and up

Wildlife Biologist Ruth Milner will share information concerning the basic biology and life history of the Great Blue



Heron. She will present a case study of how one small group's efforts, working to preserve an active heron colony on Camano Island, expanded into a very large project.

TICKETS: \$4 Members; \$6 Non-members. Advance purchase necessary. <http://www.streamkeeper.org>.

2006 Hazel Wolf Environmental Film Festival

March 23-26, 2006, Leavenworth, WA

Don't miss this unique and unprecedented festival that will present an incredible lineup of independent films focusing on art, nature, and poignant and compelling glimpses of environmental issues that are affecting us all. For more information, see www.hazelfilm.org/2006leavenworth.html.

Save the Date: Spiritual Activism Conference

May 17-20, Washington, D.C.

Building on the July 2005 conference in Berkeley, this will be the national conference to launch a prophetic spiritual political agenda to the media and the politicians in D.C. and to train organizers who will take the agenda into their communities. The conference will also celebrate the release of Rabbi Michael Lerner's new book, *The Left Hand of God*, with its proposed Spiritual Covenant for America, and the release of the paper back version of Jim Wallis' *God's Politics*. For more information, go to http://www.tikkun.org/community/spiritual_activism_conference.

Save the Date: National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Conference

June 1-4, 2006, tentatively scheduled for New Orleans



He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

O God, who hast made all the Earth
And every creature that dwells therein:
Help us, we pray thee,
to treat with compassion
the living creatures entrusted to our care,
that they may not suffer from our neglect
nor become the victims of any cruelty;
and grant that in caring for them
we may find a deeper understanding
of thy love for all Creation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.



—Source unknown.

Creation-Care Resources



Anthology of Denominational Statements

For an excellent anthology of denominational eco-justice statements check out the National Council of Churches' Eco-Justice website. Here you will find fourteen denominational statements that reflect the theological and ethical thinking of America's mainline churches. See: <http://www.nccecojustice.org/anthohome.htm>.

Free Email Christmas Cards from the Millennium Campaign

The Millennium Campaign is a United Nations program to eradicate world poverty by 2015. It has eight goals, one of which is "ensure environmental sustainability" and another is "eradicate extreme poverty and hunger." A number of websites have information about this project. For one that is quite helpful, youth-friendly, and easy to use, visit <http://www.millenniumcampaign.org>. On this site you can send free electronic Christmas cards. For each card sent, the cost of one school lunch (in an area of extreme poverty) is donated to the Millennium Campaign's Fight Hunger project.



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Who am I?

Who am I?
I am not black
Or white
Or Creek or Asian
Or Ghanaian or Sengalese
Or Latina or Latin American or Mexican
Or Brazilian or Puerto Rican.

Who am I?
I am water
And I am earth
I am mud and green
Brown and grey
Vermillion and clay
With mist for breath
And laughter blue
And tears that rain

And dance
With wind in rushes.

I am earth
And breeze
And heat
And ice
And
Womb.

I am water
And dust
And I am God's
beloved
And I am me.

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