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Transforming Moral Oblivion to Moral Agency

A Power of Faith

CYNTHIA MOE-LOBEDA

Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary of California Lutheran University

Church Divinity School of the Pacific

Director, PLTS Center for Climate Justice and Faith

cmoelobeda@plts.edu

*“Not everything that is faced can be changed,
but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”*

— James Baldwin

It is a rare and precious gift to be alive as human beings at this crucible point in time. “The next five years may be the most important in human history,” declares a South African climate expert. Decisions and actions taken by human beings in the next few years will determine the fate of life on Earth.

Never has the need to see clearly “what is going on” so that we may respond wisely borne more long-lasting and morally weighted consequences. Nevertheless, most of “us” (myself included) fail to face squarely the climate-related realities at hand and our role in them. This is most odd: Our house is burning. Though the fire has not yet reached our rooms, it is raging through many others’ rooms, and our children are in the house. Yet, we pour fuel on the fire.

“Us” and “we” are presumptuous words. Just who is the “we” presupposed in this essay? The use of first-person pronouns is complex, morally loaded, and often

ambiguous. In this article, the first-person plural usually refers to people of relative economic privilege of the Global North.¹

The essay poses a question that haunts my soul in those rare moments when I allow honesty to prevail, when I dare to see the fire. Why do we fail to recognize the deadly climate-related consequences: 1) of our lifeways and the systems that enable them, and 2) of some efforts to mitigate climate change? In other words: How is it that we fail to see the injurious climate-related consequences (in terms of dead or devastated human beings, massive species extinction, and threats to earth's life support systems) of our everyday practices and the corporate practices undergirding them?

Many are the theories and studies of why climate privileged people fail to recognize the nature and gravity of the climate crisis and our role in it and thus fail to respond as though it were indeed deadly. This article is not the place to summarize that scholarship.

Instead, we examine just two causal factors that combine forces. First, structural evil or structural sin hides in its intermingling with good. Second, the human propensity to be “selves curved in on self” lures us to allow that hiding.² Structural evil and sin are theological terms for what secular language calls structural injustice. The form of structural injustice considered in this essay is climate injustice including climate colonialism.

Structural evil in this case is the reality that ways of life considered to be normal and even good are – through climate change – gravely endangering Earth's web of life and killing and displacing people in growing numbers. By “ways of life,” I mean both the activities of our lives and the corporate and governmental policies and systems undergirding them.

Let us take a look at the “what is going on” in climate injustice which we allow to hide. We then explore the two factors noted above: how structural evil hides behind good and how “selves curved in on self” agree to that masquerade. Finally, we point to the church's liberative potential in this context.

1 This brief essay does not allow elaborating the intricacies, fluidity, and pourous nature of this category, nor the dangers and complexities inherent in using first-person plural pronouns. I have done so to some extent elsewhere. See Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013) and Moe-Lobeda, “Method in Eco-Theology: A Perspective from the Belly of the Beast.” In Cynthia Moe-Lobeda and Ernst Conradie, eds. *An Earthed Faith, Vol. 2: How Would We Know What God is Up To?* Eugene: Pickwick, 2023 and Capetown: Aosis, 2022.

2 “Selves curved in on self” is a concept used by Martin Luther to describe the state of sinfulness.

Seeing What is Going On

My view until recent years was that the Earth community hovers on a precipice. On one side is climate catastrophe beyond imagining. On the other hand, there is less severe climate catastrophe together with movement toward a more sustainable future by mitigating climate change. The aim, according to this view, should be as rapidly as possible to cut greenhouse gas emissions to the levels necessary to remain under a 1.5% increase in global temperature. This would mean switching quickly from fossil-fuel based energy to renewable energy sources. This vision for a viable future is held by many people deeply committed to addressing climate change.

However, the brown-skinned Palestinian Jew known as Jesus of Nazareth bids us to look more closely. “Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?” (Mark 8:18) What if you were to see through the eyes of people who are most vulnerable to devastation by the unfolding climate catastrophe?

Heeding that admonition reveals the climate privilege informing my earlier view and its vision of the future based on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Terrible truths of climate colonialism emerge.

Walk with me through three layers of climate colonialism or climate injustice. Seeing them is crucial. Without doing so, we cannot repent of our engagement in climate sin, and we are lost to it, bound to its unrecognized and unintended yet treacherous consequences.

First, the people most vulnerable to the ravages of climate change are – in general – not those most responsible for it. Second, climate privileged societies and sectors may respond to climate change with policies and practices that enable us to survive with some degree of well-being under the limited conditions imposed by Earth’s warming, while relegating the most climate vulnerable to death or devastation as a result of those conditions.³ These two layers are becoming well recognized in much public discourse.

The third layer is not. Measures to reduce carbon emissions designed by privileged sectors may further damage climate vulnerable people.⁴ A team of Indian

3 ‘Climate vulnerable’ refers to nations and sectors that are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. As defined by the IPCC, ‘vulnerability’ refers to ‘the degree to which a system is susceptible to, or unable to cope with, adverse effects of climate change’ (IPCC Working Group 2, 2001. Third Assessment Report, Annex B: Glossary of Terms). I use ‘climate privilege’ to indicate nations and sectors most able to adapt to or prevent those impacts, or less vulnerable to them.

4 Significant material from this paragraph is taken from Moe-Lobeda, *Building a Moral Economy: Pathways for People of Courage* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, forthcoming 2024), Chapter Seven.

scholars points out that “poor and marginalized communities in the developing countries often suffer more from ... climate mitigation schemes than from the impacts of actual physical changes in the climate.”⁵ Many voices of the Global South recognize these dynamics as climate debt or climate colonialism. They situate it as a continuation of the colonialism that enabled the Global North to enrich itself for five centuries at the expense of Africa, Latin America, Indigenous North America, and parts of Asia. “Green colonialism” happens around the world when colonized peoples are damaged by efforts to produce renewable energy. Hydro-electric dams displacing communities, destruction of crop lands to grow biofuels, mining for minerals needed in renewable energy production, windmill farms destroying Sami reindeer-herding lands, and carbon offset projects on Indigenous peoples’ lands are but a few examples.⁶ Some Pacific Island communities speak of “blue colonialism” – the damage to the seas, ocean floor, marine-based ecosystems and food chain, and, thereby, to their fishing livelihoods and food source, caused by deep-sea mining for minerals used in renewable energy production.⁷ The electric vehicle industry feeds the push to mine copper from the ocean floor. I know; I drive one.

5 Soumya Dutta et al., *Climate Change and India* (New Delhi: Daanish Books, 2013), 12.

6 Carbon offset projects on Indigenous peoples’ lands have caused internal conflicts and have limited Indigenous communities from using their lands for medicine or other cultural purposes. See Pennelys Droz and Julian Brave Noisecat, “Mobilizing an Indigenous Green New Deal,” Position Paper (Rapid City, SD: NDN Collective, September 2019), <https://ndncollective.org/position-paper/mobilizing-an-indigenous-green-new-deal/>.

7 For many Pacific Islanders, identity, livelihood, and purpose are intimately connected to the sea. (See The Pacific Blue Line, “Protect Our Ocean Statement,” Pacific Blue Line, n.d., <https://www.pacificblueline.org/pacific-blue-line-statement/>.) For an account of opposition to deep-sea mining see Ralph Regevanu, in *Ecological Racism and Deep-Sea Mining in the Pacific*, G20 Interfaith Forum Webinar, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=984gUo55fac>.

In 2022, an alliance of Pacific region parliamentarians issued the Pacific Blueline Statement. This call to protect the oceans from deep sea mining was endorsed by multiple organizations and leaders who see extraction as continuing the legacies of colonialism and nuclear testing that made their islands and seas into “sacrifice zones.” The parliamentarians write: “Our forebears have ... stood firm against the ruinous incursions of nuclear testing, driftnet fishing and bottom trawling, and marine pollution. Against impossible odds, they united to move a world to adopt a nuclear test ban treaty, a ban on driftnet fishing, and the London Dumping Convention. Deep sea mining (DSM) is the latest in a long list of destructive industries to be thrust into our sacred ocean. It is a new, perilous frontier, extractive industry being falsely promoted as a proven answer to our economic needs.... We call for a total ban on DSM within our territorial waters and in areas beyond national jurisdiction.” Pacific Blue Line, “Protect Our Ocean Statement.”

Recognizing these three layers reveals the why behind the “just transition” movement and its fierce cry: A rapid transition from fossil fuel-based societies to renewable energy societies is not adequate to achieve a just future of flourishing for all. That transition is profoundly good and necessary. Yet aiming for it is deceptive and dangerous *if not accompanied by unwavering commitment to bring a racial justice lens, an economic justice lens, a gender justice lens, and an anti-colonial lens to decisions regarding energy*. Said differently, climate change mitigation is inadequate; a “just transition” demands that mitigation efforts create no sacrifice zones – no blue colonialism and no green colonialism. *As a result, the high consuming world must not only shift to renewables but must also vastly reduce energy use. We must not continue our current energy orgy even if fossil fuels are replaced with renewables.*⁸ We must use far less energy so that acquiring the resources needed to produce it does not deplete lands and waters, and does not exploit people. “The ‘green’ energy industry promises to build a sustainable wonderland with electric cars and bullet trains powered by limitless renewable energy supply. It reinforces the dangerous idea that we can maintain our addiction to high-energy lifestyles in a sustainable way,” explains Susanne Normann of University of Oslo after studying wind energy development on Southern Sami herding lands.⁹

Avoiding climate colonialism depends upon recognizing it. That is, we must overcome our blindness to the exploitative and extractive consequences not only of life as we live it, but also of many efforts to mitigate climate change. Only by seeing clearly what is going on can we shape a vision for an equitable ecological future and paths leading toward it.

Overcoming our moral blindness requires deciphering factors that obscure our vision – factors that hide the terrible climate consequences of life as we live it, and of climate mitigation efforts not shaped by a “just transition” commitment. Here we examine two factors that work together insidiously.¹⁰ They are the intertwining of good and evil, and the lure of living as “selves curved in on self.” Each is made more dangerous by the other.

8 Stan Cox, *The Green New Deal and Beyond* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2020).

9 S. Normann S., “Green colonialism in the Nordic context: Exploring Southern Saami representations of wind energy development, *Journal of Community Psychology*. 2021 Jan 49(1): 77–94. doi:10.1002/jcop.22422. Epub 2020 Aug 14. PMID: 32794192. Quotation from 78–80.

10 Elsewhere I have examined other factors. See, for example: Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), chap. 4.

The Intertwining of Good and Evil as Experienced by “Selves Curved in on Self”¹¹

How is it possible that people with infinite access to information about what is happening in our locals and around the world, can so miserably fail to see the deadly climate-related consequences of our lifeways and of some efforts to mitigate climate change? How is it that we fail to see the links between our everyday practices and the corporate practices enabling them on the one hand, and the dead or devastated human beings, massive species extinction, and threats to earth’s life support systems-on-the other? What makes it so difficult for people of privilege to recognize structural injustice and our participation in it?

Perceiving climate colonialism theologically as structural evil or structural sin and holding it in light of the theological claim that, in all things human, good and evil are intertwined, yields a clue.¹² It is the capacity of structural evil to masquerade as good or as necessity by intermingling with good.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, reflecting from prison on the widespread complicity with fascism in Hitler’s Germany, provides striking insight into how structural evil

11 The term, “evil” is used differently by different theologians. I do not use it to connote an ontological category or a dynamic beyond the human that is not amenable to human agency. Rather I use it as an appropriate theological category for what social theory calls “structural injustice” or “structural violence.” Using a theological category enables finding theological insight into how injustice operates and more specifically for our purposes here, how it hides. The concept of “evil” bears far more complexity than is possible to address in this essay. Foremost among them is the ambiguity of what is good and what is evil in a world in which all alternatives to an unjust situation may themselves be tainted with injustice and in which what brings well-being to some vulnerable people may bring damage to others. Such ambiguity, together with the pernicious presence of sin invading human good, make discerning what is morally evil and what is good a vexing task. This ambiguity itself is a fierce draw, pulling the eyes of our hearts and minds away from recognizing injustice where it is so entangled with good. But unraveling the implications of that complexity is not our purpose here.

12 Throughout history, some theologians have distinguished between sin and evil. Christopher Morse, for example, defines evil as “whatever stands in the way of life taking place, while the word “sin” denotes our complicity in this evil. See Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), 239. Others use the two terms “almost interchangeably (to)...mean nearly the same thing.” See, for example: Ted Peters, *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 8–9. Edward Farley uses the two more or less interchangeably (see especially p. 120) using theological inquiry into sin as inquiry into evil. So too does Eleazar Fernandez in his *Reimagining the Human: Theological Anthropology in Response to Systemic Evil*. While I could argue either perspective, contributing to that debate is not my intention. I use structural sin and structural evil to signify theologically the same reality: structural injustice.

hides.¹³ Describing “the great masquerade of evil,” he writes that evil “appear[s] disguised as light, charity, historical necessity, or social justice.”¹⁴

With striking resonance, Ivone Gebara, half a century later, eloquently describes the hiddenness of evil and adds insight into how “evil present in institutions and social structures...is sometimes beyond recognition. One lives with it daily...” Evil, she avers, is “so mixed up in our existence that we can live in it without even taking account of it as evil.”¹⁵ She notes that evil slips into obscurity by intermingling with good: It is “not easy to spot evil’s presence” when it is “intermingled in our culture, education, and religion – events or behaviors regarded as normal, common, even good.”¹⁶

James Poling comes to similar conclusions. He too finds evil hiding by “masking itself as good,” “claiming necessity,” or “remaining intertwined with the good.”¹⁷

This clue is invaluable. We may fail to see the terrible truth – that our lifeways and the corporate policies and practices undergirding them are killing and damaging people through climate change, and that some efforts to mitigate climate change extend that harm – because those policies and practices are entwined with what seems to be good, necessary, or normal.

To illustrate: ample evidence demonstrates that humanity must vastly reduce fossil fuel production if we are to avoid the most catastrophic levels of climate change. Many in the climate vulnerable world and their allies in activist communities are crying out: “leave it in the ground!” Some Pacific Island nations who will lose their lands to rising seas have proposed a fossil-fuel non-proliferation treaty.¹⁸

Yet, wealthy nations and their banks continue to finance new exploration and on-going extraction of gas and oil, and countless ordinary people remain silent. Why? In part it is because the evil is so entwined with the good. Fossil fuels enable me to visit my long-distance children and grandchildren. Oil provides the fabric for my sheets and carpet; the plastic packaging that keeps hospital supplies clean, thus saving lives; the fertilizers used in producing food; the materials that go into building homes, schools, and firetrucks.

13 This and the following two paragraphs are drawn from Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 3.

14 Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 4.

15 Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women’s Experience of Evil and Salvation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 2.

16 *Ibid.*, 2–3 and 58.

17 James Poling, *Deliver Us from Evil* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 119, 113, 119.

18 <https://fossilfuel treaty.org/>.

The good does not justify the evil of fossil-fuel related industries maximizing profit in ways that destroy livable climate. Nor does the evil necessarily mean that I should never fly or that humans should use no oil. Rather, this illustrates the intermingling of good and evil, and the extent to which that mixing may cloak evil. Neither I nor my society choose to recognize fully the collective consequences of our airborne societal norms and our flagrant continuation and expansion of fossil fuel extraction, transport, and use.

Despite this hiddenness of structural evil, it may be that we would open our eyes to it, IF a corollary factor did not come into play. Here Luther's understanding of sin as "selves curved in on self" sheds light. ("Selves curved in on self" refers to the human propensity to serve self and one's "tribe" alone regardless of cost to others.) Perhaps we would open our eyes if narrowly defined short-term self-interest did not reign over commitment to the widespread long-term good. Consider two expressions of that narrowly defined short-term self-interest: maximizing financial gain and protection from change.

In the very short-term, people with direct or indirect investment in fossil fuel industries gain by its continuing to maximize short-term profit through extraction and production of fossil fuels. We may try to maximize financial gain by banking with banks that fund fossil fuel industries, or by having mutual funds or pension funds that invest in high carbon-producing industries such as industrial agriculture, textiles, and plastics.

Likewise, protecting ourselves from change, we may choose (largely unconsciously) not to disrupt our everyday routines by the changes that would erupt if society took seriously "keeping it in the ground" and a "just transition." It would mean using far less energy, devoting huge amounts of time to civic engagement, shifting swiftly to prioritizing locally and regionally produced food, refusing to use single-use plastics, and more. Choosing collectively not to change lifeways and systems that are damaging or destroying others through climate change is a second manifestation of narrowly defined short-term self-interest, the sin of "selves curved in on self," both as individuals and as societies.

I suspect that allegiance to that self-interest – even at the cost of others' lives – encourages me to turn my eyes from the horrific consequences of life as we live it. I suspect this is the case for many of us. That is, "selves curved in on self" are more likely to allow evil to hide. Theologically speaking, at least from a Lutheran perspective, this is at the heart of sin.

Freedom from Moral Blindness, and from Selves Curved in on Self

The time is the near future. A heatwave has killed millions in India. The Ministry for the Future – a global department established with UN funding to advocate for future generations – struggles to find ways to counter climate change. The incoming director of the Ministry speaks earnestly to its current director: “I think we need a new religion.... Well, maybe it’s not a new religion. An old religion. Maybe the oldest religion. But back among us, big time. Because I think we need it.... We’re going to bring it back. We need it.”¹⁹

Never has the world so needed the church to be the church – people called forth to recognize and receive the infinite and intimate love of God and to embody that love into the world as justice-seeking, Earth-relishing neighbor-love. That love, as a biblical and theological norm, is to guide not only interpersonal relationships but also political, economic, and cultural systems because they have significant impact on neighbors’ wellbeing. Countering what thwarts this neighbor-love – such as “selves curved in on self” – is one primary role of faith.

In this, Christianity is not alone among religious traditions.²⁰ Religion, at its best, has the capacity to draw us out of captivity to “selves curved in on self” and, instead, to see and serve a greater good, a good oriented around inclusive and widespread justice and compassion. Said differently, religion may enable a degree of freedom from self-absorption and, therefore, freedom for aligning with a greater good. Baraka Lenga, Tanzanian climate scientist and activist, says it well: “Religious groups, no matter the faith, have the power to tame the society’s greedy and save lives.”²¹

Karen Armstrong argues that world’s great religions arose “to reorient human life along the lines of empathy, compassion, justice, sacred presence, and generosity enabled by surrendering...egotism and greed.” Walter Brueggemann demonstrates similarly that the God revealed in the Bible directed people to organize their societies in ways that built economic justice and politics of compassion. Heeding this God today, he says, “requires advocacy for polity and practice that

19 Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future* (New York, NY: Orbit, 2020), 254–5.

20 This and the following four paragraphs are drawn from Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Building Moral Economies: Pathways for People of Courage* (Minneapolis Fortress Press, forthcoming 2024).

21 Baraka Lenga, “Role of Fossil Fuels,” repost, GreenFaith, 2023, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/baraka-lenga-9851981b4_climatecrisis-climatecrisis-faiths4climate-activity-6971163662141014016-yNnf.

are pro-neighbor, anti-predation, and anti-accumulation.”²² Theologians Ulrich Duchrow and Franz Hinkelammert argue convincingly that the “prophecy of Ancient Israel and Torah, Buddhism, the Jesus movement and the early...church” arose to protest the political economies emerging just before and during the Axial Age that accumulated vast wealth for a few by dispossessing others. These religions, they argue, sought change in oppressive structures and in the accompanying “thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of persons.”²³

All of these scholars conclude that, with such roots, those religions (along with Islam, which Duchrow and Hinkelammert describe as a renewal of Axial Age spirituality) may provide spiritual strength today to confront exploitative economies and the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that accompany them, and to build more compassionate and just ways of living.²⁴ In essence, a primary function of religions is to teach ways of structuring life together along the lines of justice, compassion, and Earth’s well-being and to link us, deeply and tangibly, to sacred power for embodying or practicing those lifeways.

Five hundred years earlier, Martin Luther said as much. Religion (in his case, faith in Christ) can free us, although only partially, from lives as “selves curved in on self,” and for lives that serve the well-being of our neighbors, especially our neighbors in need.

22 Walter Brueggemann, “Faith Seeking Economic Justice,” *Christian Century*, June 1, 2022, 15.

23 Duchrow and Hinkelammert, *Transcending Greedy Money*, vii and 2. In more detail, they argue that beginning in about 3,000 BCE, the emerging urban powers began to demand labor from agrarian tribal communities (9). By about the 8th century BCE, money, interest, and private property “spread widely in the Mediterranean, Ancient Near East, and Far East, leading to accumulation of land and other wealth for some and loss of land and debt slavery for others” (9–15). This economic oppression gave rise to the great prophets in the last part of the eighth and throughout the seventh century BCE. Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others called for justice and righteousness lost in the rise of new property rights and money mechanisms. They claimed that, with the cancellation of justice and the rights of the poor, Yahweh, the God of Israel, had also been abandoned (48). The authors go on to note: “This is the heritage that Jesus and his movement draw upon. He builds on the prophetic and Torah tradition” (52). This is precisely Brueggemann’s assertion, and much New Testament scholarship (since Ched Myers’ *Who Will Roll Away the Stone* in 1994) examines Jesus and the first century Jesus movement as a moral-spiritual response to the oppression of the Roman political-economy and a source of spiritual strength to live according to a politics of compassion rather than a politics of oppression. Rev. William Barber says as much: “These faith traditions were born as response to terrible oppression by empire” (from the webinar “Moral Revolution: An Interfaith Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic” cited above).

24 Brueggemann and Lerner make this claim in relationship specifically to the beginnings of Judaism, while Armstrong extends it to the other Axial Age religions and their offspring, Christianity and Islam.

Not only theologians, but secular figures appeal to religion to play this role in relationship to the climate crisis. The renowned literary figure Amitav Ghosh, speaking *not* as a religious person, lays out the horrors of climate change and humankind's apparent inability to deal with it. He notes, however, a few "signs of hope," continuing that "the most promising" of these "is the increasing involvement of religious groups and leaders in the politics of climate change."²⁵ This potential of religion, Ghosh suggests, lies partly in its capacity to move people beyond the compulsion to serve primarily "the interests of a particular group of people" – be it a nation, a corporation, a clan, or other.²⁶

Let us be honest. We are human, and therefore we are (in Luther's words) God's *rusty* tools, not God's bright, shiny, perfect tools. This side of death, we will never be *fully* freed from selves curved in on self. Yet we can become partially free, and religion is one path to that freedom.

If religious faith offers a degree of freedom from "selves curved in on self" – freedom to live according to a higher calling and to serve a higher good – *then religious faith, authentically practiced, offers some degree of freedom to see what must be seen and freedom to reject the norms and demands of the extractive exploitative economy and its magnetic pull toward maximizing personal gain over all else. It offers, instead, freedom to acknowledge what is going on with climate injustice, and to respond in light of the widespread long-term good.*

A crucial question arises from these assertions. *What elements within religious faith could: 1) generate the courage and will to see what must be seen and 2) cultivate freedom from living as "selves curved in on self" in relationship to the climate crisis, both as individuals and societies.*

Here I suggest ten liberative elements of religious faith that may nourish this struggle for moral vision and moral freedom. More importantly, I invite readers to take on the question and pursue it fervently. Religious practice, belief, and heritage offer: 1) a heritage of faith-rooted resistance; 2) resources for kindling our hunger for communion/community; 3) ethical teachings and values; 4) connection with a higher power that is both within us and transcends us; 5) resources for combining inner work of spiritual strengthening with outer work for structural change; 6) courage; 7) hope; 8) grounding stories that counter the life-shaping narratives of western capitalist culture and its allegiance to extractive economies;

25 Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 159.

26 He also sees the potential of religion in its already existing networks and communities capable of mobilizing large numbers of people (159).

9) self-identity as infinitely worthy and beloved regardless of what we own or how we look;²⁷ and 10) internal critique of where religions have undergirded the extractive lifeways and systems that breed climate change. These elements may bear more fruit when pursued not only within a faith tradition but also in collaboration with people of other faith traditions, joining energies in the quest to be a transformative force for climate justice.

The fact that religious traditions contain these liberative elements does not assure that these traditions will step up to the plate. The borderland of religion as it *could* be practiced and religion as it is practiced is constantly shifting. Sometimes the two are the same; religious communities do practice their liberative elements. However, that is not always the case. More often than not, they/we fall short of embodying the healing and liberating riches within faith traditions. *If religions are to help avert our mad dash into the worst of climate disaster including climate injustice in many forms, then people who identify in some way with religious traditions must take hold of their liberative elements, stir them up, and offer them humbly to the broader public with the explicit intention of nurturing rapid and radical just transition from fossil-fuel based societies to regenerative societies in ways that serve the good of people already marginalized by racial, class-based, and gender-based inequity and by historical and current colonization.* This shift to more equitable and ecological societies is a matter of life and death. And it is a beautiful calling.

In Closing

We posed a question: Why do climate privileged people fail to see the terrible truth – that our lifeways (and the policies, economic systems, and cultural assumptions undergirding them) are killing people through climate change, and that some efforts to mitigate climate change actually harm climate vulnerable people?

Examining the reality of these impacts as a form of structural evil, we suggested this: We may fail to see this structural evil, in part, because structural evil hides by intermingling with good. Moreover, the propensity to put narrowly defined self-interest above the common good – to live as selves curved in on self – lures us to accept the ease and comfort that come with that hiddenness. If this is the case, then the church with its inherent call to name a thing what it is and its capacity to (partially) free people from bondage to selves curved in on self has a profound role to play. So too do other religious traditions.

27 The power of this element lies in countering the drive to consume that is fed by a sense of unworthiness that may be filled by what we own or how we look.