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Essay

Shifting Epistemologies, Shifting Our Stories—Where Might We Find Hope for a World on the Brink of Climate Catastrophe?

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Abstract: In the early 1990s, David Orr wrote about the epistemological myths of North American culture, and offered ecological literacy as a form of resistance. In the same decade, Parker Palmer confronted dominant epistemologies in religious institutions, and retrieved early Christian frames by way of resistance. One was writing through the lens of environmental science, and one through the lens of the desert mothers and fathers of Christian history. Neither acknowledged the First Nations, Metis and Inuit epistemologies which offered similarly contesting frames. It may be too late, yet even in a moment of climate catastrophe there is hope that shifting our forms of knowing can invite pedagogical practices that transform our communities. This essay will articulate the congruence between these disparate and diverse stances as sacred ground within which to root embodied, theologically astute pedagogies for the 21st century. Several pragmatic exercises that have emerged as fruitful for learners seeking to embody compelling counter narratives are also offered.

Keywords: environmental education; religious education; indigenous epistemologies; storytelling exercises; story categories; adult development

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1. Introduction

Story matters. Story offers context and connects to larger contexts. Story helps us to make sense of ourselves and each other. We live embedded in a cacophony of stories, most of which are digitally mediated in some fashion (Hess 2011, 2016, 2018, 2019a, 2020, 2021). In 2022, as the world faces climate devastation, how we tell the story of transcendence, of relationship with God, with the earth, and with each other is impossibly urgent. Yet we must try to find ways to discern how to untangle the knots of destructive stories, and braid those of hope and resilience together.

Let me begin this essay by noting that I grew up near the shores of Lake Winnebago, in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in the United States. For the last two decades, I have lived a ten-minute walk from the Mississippi River in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Both of these settings are places where people are encouraged to be outside. I grew up bicycling, skating (both roller and ice), canoeing, sailing, even rappelling off state park cliffs. When we moved to Minnesota, we were immediately told that there is no such thing as bad weather only the wrong clothing, and invited into multiple forms of outdoor recreation.

The "outdoors", then, has always been a big part of my life and the contexts in which I have lived. But note the ways in which I was invited to experience the outdoors: always as a place to play, as a form of "recreation", as something to be enjoyed. Yet both of these places—Oshkosh, Wisconsin and Saint Paul, Minnesota—hold haunting histories in their very grounds. "Oshkosh" was the name of a Menominee Indian chieftain, yet I grew up with little or no knowledge of the anguish, injustice, and deep loss endured by the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) people at the hands of settlers, a history that continues in so many ways. One of my favorite walking paths takes me past the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, a place deeply sacred to the Dakota peoples, the ground of their creation, and also the place of their internment and much death following the US-Dakota war in 1862 (Carley 1961; Westerman and White 2012).

How is it that the "story of the outdoors"—a story that led me to work for a conservation organization shortly after college—has never been shared with me with deep enough memory and care to include these elements of the land's story? At least one response to that question lies at the heart of what it means to do environmental education, and thus the challenges we must face if we as a whole community of creation are to care for our deeply ailing world.

Stories come in multiple forms, some of which are transformative and many of which are "de-formative" and deeply destructive. A story which invites you into more complex meaning, which shares ways to resist oppression, or even simply draws you into deeper empathy, can be profoundly transformative. Stories which constrain imagination, limit connection, dehumanize and polarize, on the other hand, can be deeply destructive.

Who tells stories, the context in which the stories are engaged, and the process by which we share them is an essential element of the meaning we construct with them. The competition over what it means to know, over who is a knower, over who determines what is authoritative, indeed, what it even means "to know" is the challenge we must face if we are to be attentive to the sacred stories at the heart of religious community. The conflict over our central epistemological assertions is clearly visible at the heart of environmental catastrophes. Was the world created in seven 24 h days, or is evolutionary theory a more adequately descriptive frame for seeing each other and the earth? Are human actions implicated in the changes we are detecting in glacial ice, or are such changes predestined and unchangeable manifestations of a deity's transcendent agency?

The challenges here are not about making choices between one reality and another, but rather about understanding with humility and complexity how we can embody stories which frame our world through scientific lenses *and* theological ones. I believe we must draw on the ancient—and still present—meaning-making frames our indigenous siblings offer us if we are to engage deeply both the despair and the hope that resides amidst this catastrophe. Indigenous epistemologies move beyond an either/or framing and more deeply into depicting and embody what it means to know through complex and resilient story-making and storytelling (Antoine et al. 2018; Garod et al. 2017; Reyhner 2015; Cajete 2015; Kirkness 2013).

In the early 1990s, David Orr, arguably one of the most influential of environmental educators, wrote about the epistemological myths of North American culture, and offered ecological literacy as a form of resistance to them (Orr 1994). In the same decade, Parker Palmer confronted the dominant epistemologies of North American religious institutions, and retrieved early Christian frames by way of resistance (Palmer 1983, 1998). The former was writing through the lens of environmental science, and the latter through the lens of the desert mothers and fathers of Christian history. Neither acknowledged the First Nations, Metis and Inuit epistemologies which offered similarly contesting frames. Perhaps they were unaware of these ways of knowing the world, or perhaps they avoided what could have been cultural appropriation? Regardless of why there was no such acknowledgement, much of what they wrote is congruent with indigenous meaning-making, and can be even more deeply transformative for religious communities. One clear way to avoid cultural mis-appropriation is to develop thorough relational accountability, to learn with and from indigenous communities while respecting their complexity and commitment. It may be too late, yet even in a moment of climate catastrophe there is hope that shifting our forms of knowing can invite pedagogical practices that transform our communities.

I need to share one more part of my own story, so as to contextualize clearly from whence this argument arises. I write from a very specific space in ways that might be evocative for others but cannot be prescriptive for people beyond my location. I am a faculty member at an ELCA Lutheran seminary in Minnesota. I have been there for more than two decades as their professor of educational leadership. I am also a Roman Catholic layperson and a white, cis-gendered woman with two adult children and a spouse of more than three decades, all three of whom are male and cis-gendered. That is a very narrow stance from which to observe, and I want to write primarily to people who inhabit that kind

of social location, because far too often we are the producers and enforcers of dominant cultural streams. I hope that in doing so I may reach such producer/enforcers, and open up some room for change.

2. Stories and Storying

2.1. A Story of Wolves

There is an ancient story attributed to the Cherokee people[1] which tells us that we are each made up of two wolves, one which is evil and feeds on our anger and other base emotions, and one which is good and feeds on our joys and compassion. The one we feed the most will be the one who lives. This is but one way to speak about the competing and often conflicting impulses and desires that make up what it can mean to be human. Note where human agency resides in this story: in making choices about what to feed, how to nurture, a particular dynamic.

I grew up with Christians in churches who tell a story of conflicting emotions and actions in terms of the Fall in the book of Genesis, and so draw on a theology of original sin to describe the ways in which we as humans must constantly seek forgiveness from a judgmental God who rules in omnipotence. Even the overflowing grace of a God who chooses Incarnation, who chooses to pour Godself out in a kenosis beyond imagining in the body of Jesus the Christ gets interpreted as seeing God's action as a "sacrifice" for our sins, rather than as an exercise in "at-one-ment." For me, at least, this story has been profoundly destructive, leading to shame and a temptation to view myself as "saved" while others are "damned." There are, however, many other ways to tell the stories of Genesis. I have been gifted with biblical colleagues who have helped me to follow the Christ into a sacramental imagination that leads to these other interpretations, each of which tends to "feed the wolf" in differing ways, and several of which invite us into compassion, justice, and clear engagement in global interdependence.[2]

My point here is that we are story people. We tell stories to make sense of ourselves, of our relationships with others, with God, indeed with all of creation. The challenge for religious educators in the uncertainty, constant change, and turmoil of the worlds we inhabit is to ignite curiosity about the stories we hold most dear, to curate versions of them that are life-giving, and to help people develop the practices and capacities necessary for a thriving religious imagination.

2.2. Three Curricula

Educators have long observed, as did Elliott Eisner in 1985, that learning is embodied in three curricula: the explicit, the implicit, and the null (Eisner 1985; Kim-Cragg 2019). The explicit curriculum being that which we intentionally seek to teach, the implicit being those elements, that information, which we pick up unintentionally or around the edges of any explicit curriculum. The null curriculum, perhaps the most powerful of all, is that which we learn through silences, through taboos.

I grew up with an explicit curriculum about the outdoors being a place in which to play, a resource for my enjoyment, a source of beauty and peace. The implicit curriculum of those spaces carried as well the sense that I as a human being had both the right and the ability to plumb those spaces to their depths for my enjoyment. The null curriculum, the silence at its heart, taught me to ignore the histories behind the names of these places I loved, to not listen for the anguish emerging there. It also taught me, a white person growing up in a middle-class space, not to ask where everyone else was. Why were there not people of many other races enjoying these spaces? The native peoples who had tended that land for centuries were simply an ancient stereotype. The enslaved peoples, and the people who had been brought to build the railroad from Asian lands, these people were nowhere to be found in the spaces I inhabited, and that was typical, that was what I learned was the norm, how it was supposed to be. Never mind that Wisconsin as a state in the 1970s and 1980s as I grew up had many communities of people in it from many vastly

differing lands and contexts. I learned not to ask certain questions, and I learned not to see, not to feel, certain kinds of pain (Brookfield and Hess 2021).

It is this combination of the three curricula that we need to break open. As renowned scholar of leadership Brené Brown has written: "... numbing vulnerability is especially debilitating because it doesn't just deaden the pain of our difficult experiences; numbing vulnerability also dulls our experiences of love, joy, belonging, creativity, and empathy. We can't selectively numb emotion. Numb the dark and you numb the light". (Brown 2012, p. 137). Refusing to acknowledge the pain and the anguish of these places also means I, like so many others who grew up in these "curricula", have been cut off from the deep joy and love to which our God invites us. Far from feeding only one of the wolves, we are essentially starving ourselves all together (Ayres 2021).

2.3. A Global Pandemic in the 2020s

It is 2022 as I write this piece, and there are diametrically opposed stories vying for our attention and embodiment. We are currently in the third year of a global pandemic due to the SARS-CoV2 virus. The stories swirling around compete constantly for our attention. Is this a mild bug, a mild flu? Is this a devastating virus which has killed more than 1,000,000 people in the US alone? Is this a viral vector deliberately created by sinister entities seeking to implant nanochips in people? Are basic measures like physical distancing and masking social goods to be embraced by all? Or are vaccines and face coverings deceptive and hidden attempts to erase personal freedoms?

Notice, though, how few of these stories lift up the possible origins of this virus in the devastation of our global home, and the climatic changes that are ruining biomes. There is actually a lot of scientific evidence that this virus, and others sure to follow it, are being born and finding pools in which to grow and mutate, because of the profoundly altering impact humans are having on our earth, on our shared home.[3] Here again there is a null curriculum that is preventing us from perceiving deeply that to which our God (at least in Christian settings, the ones from which I speak) is calling us.[4]

What might we observe about this discontinuity, this disconnect between the ubiquitous stories that heighten our fears and anxieties in terms of individual responsibility, and any others that might articulate shared and communal forms of knowing?

The story of the two wolves has been embedded in so much popular culture that it has lost much of its original context.[5] If we could retrieve and reclaim some of that context, we could learn that the native communities telling this story (and so many others) begin within a shared space of collective knowing. Their epistemological standpoint, if you will, is thoroughly communal, deeply relational, and explicitly story-driven. It is not simply that each individual person "feeds" their wolves, but also that the very notion of having within oneself a "wolf" is connected with a way of viewing oneself and creation as deeply entwined. I would caution here against the cultural mis-appropriation of notions of a "spirit animal" that have become so dangerously popular,[6] and emphasize instead that this story arises within an epistemological stance which honors all of creation, and views human persons as but one participant in that creation (Garod et al. 2017; Reyhner 2015; Cajete 2015; Kirkness 2013).

2.4. Genesis Stories and beyond

Christians who inhabit the kind of social location in which I find myself need to be asking profound questions about the Genesis stories, and whether there might be a different standpoint, a different form of knowing, from which to hear and embrace that story (Dahill and Martin-Schramm 2016; Johnson 2014; Rasmussen 2013). For instance, Parker Palmer describes in his book *To Know As We Are Known*, an interpretation of that story which suggests that Adam and Eve

> . . . were driven from the Garden because of the kind of knowledge they reached for—a knowledge that distrusted and excluded God. Their drive to know arose not from love but from curiosity and control, from the desire to possess powers

> belonging to God alone. They failed to honor the fact that God knew them first, knew them in their limits as well as their potentials. In their refusal to know as they were known, they reached for a kind of knowledge that always leads to death. (Palmer 1983, p. 151)

This is an interpretation of the story which highlights our need to stand in humility and awe, rather than reaching for power. There is a story in Genesis that is far more often told when thinking about creation and the environment, and that is the story of God giving Adam "dominion" over creation. Rather than interpreting that word in its sense of "domain" and "tending to the domain"—an epistemological stance that would be congruent with seeing humanity as part of creation—that text has far too often been understood as granting humans power over creation, and as a license for domination (Chamberlain 2000, p. 137).

3. Teaching with Story

3.1. Four Kinds of Stories

How might we engage these iconic stories in ways that draw people into deeper and more grounded versions, that emphasize the love of which Palmer writes, and the humility of being part of, not owner or controller, of creation? Seeking to understand how to shift interpretation means seeking to understand engaging story, storying, storytelling. It demands that we understand the stance, the epistemologies, we wish to honor. Bell and her team, while working in the field of anti-racism education, have identified four categories of stories that help to illuminate this task of transformative interpretation and learning. They write of "dominant or stock", "concealed", "resistance", and "counter" stories (Bell et al. 2008).

"Dominant or stock" stories are those which are "the most public and ubiquitous in dominant, mainstream institutions". They are told by those who hold control in various discursive terrains, and who are able to embed their stories in public rituals, monuments, school curricula, and many other institutional and structural forms. They "tell us a lot about what a society considers important and meaningful".

"Concealed" stories, in contrast, while existing in the same spaces as so-called stock stories, "most often remain in the shadows, hidden from public view". These stories might be "told and retold by people in the margins whose experiences and aspirations they express and honor". Yet there is a seductive element to such stories because only "insiders" know them and in our current information ecology they can be drawn into conspiracy frameworks all too easily.

The third kind of story, "resistance" stories, are "both historical and contemporary, that tell about how people have resisted forms of oppression such as racism, challenged the stock stories that support it, and fought for more equal and inclusive social arrangements". Such stories can teach us about perspectives and practices that have existed throughout our history up to the present time, thus expanding our vision of what is possible in our own work for the kin-dom of God. Note that even a small shift—from "kingdom of God" to "kin-dom of "God"—invites resistance to dominance.

The final category of which they write, "counter stories", contains stories which "are new stories that are deliberately constructed to challenge the stock stories. They build on and amplify resistance stories, they offer ways to interrupt the status quo and work for change. These stories enact continuing critique and resistance to the stock stories and enable new possibilities for inclusive human community" (Bell et al. 2008, p. 19 and following).

3.2. When Counter Stories Get Co-Opted into Stock Stories

It is critical to grasp that indigenous epistemologies are counter stories within hegemonic cultural spaces. They may well offer resistance stories, and to some extent have been concealed from dominant view, but at their heart they are "new" stories, in the sense that they are from an entirely different frame than that which structures the stories of dominance within which I grew up (DeMars and Tait 2019).

Yet at the same time, it is also possible to perceive the ways in which a story that arose in a very specific context, within a very specific epistemology, can be drawn into one of these four categories (Ng 2020). We both know and understand how important context is, and yet need to begin to grasp that context collapse is all around us. Context collapse is part of what occurs when stories from one specific people, told in a specific context and with a specific set of practices, get lifted up and floated on the global digital sea, losing most of that context (Hess 2019b, p. 215). This happens all too often with stories that arise from within indigenous communities. A very famous example might be the teary-eyed Indian commercial/PSA from the 1970s (https://youtu.be/8Suu84khNGY, accessed on 1 February 2022). In that commercial an Indian paddling his canoe down a highly polluted stream evokes a commitment to the land that is now almost past retrieving. His single tear, highlighted by the camera, has an accompanying narration in an ominously deep male voice saying "people start pollution, people can stop it". The "solution"? Write for a pamphlet on how to "Keep America Beautiful".

Here a thoroughly relational element between a person and the land which is characteristic of many indigenous epistemologies is being used to attempt to catalyze opposition to littering. Never mind that genocide and centuries of settler colonialism have erased these peoples from the very land they were connected to, here the native person is constructed wholly as a stereotype and used instrumentally in the service of the dominant story. To be blunt, individual litter was never the real environmental problem (a reality to which the smoke stacks belching smog in the background of the commercial make subtle allusion).

In 2022, a commercial aired selling a package of streaming media (Hulu, Disney+, and ESPN) starring the actor Dave Bautista as he paddled a canoe (https://youtu.be/Cc6QxlXjvWU, accessed on 1 February 2022) down a quiet stream. The version airing within mobile games includes him trailing his hand in the water while saying "I love you, stream". Fifty years of advertising have developed from a native person at the heart of a PSA bemoaning littering, to an ad for streaming media with a person whose physical characteristics subliminally evoke native stereotypes (olive-toned skin, long hair pulled back in a single ponytail, actions which clearly relish the "outdoors") and which seeks to sell digital media streams.

Here a comprehensive connection to the land and its resources, understood within many native epistemologies as a relative, is trivialized and narrowed down to an excuse for staying hooked to a computer screen even while outdoors "in nature". This is an example of how counter stories arising from indigenous epistemologies have been drawn into dominant stories, perhaps identified as somewhat "concealed" or "minoritized"—but nonetheless understood only in relation to a dominant story.

3.3. A Counter Story of Ecological Literacy

In practical theological terms, the challenge is not simply to offer better interpretations of biblical stories, but also to deconstruct the racism and other oppressive dynamics structured into all of our stock representations through their underlying epistemological framing, through what is understood to be "knowledge" and what constitutes "knowing". Hearlson calls this "unmasking of idols" (Hearlson 2021, p. 138).

Scholars and teachers within the movement for environmental education have been seeking for decades to push back against dominant stories. Consider the basic assertions that David Orr (1994), a key figure in environmental education in the US, offered by identifying what he termed "key myths" of US culture.

3.3.1. Myths Which Prevent Ecological Literacy

- Ignorance is a solvable problem
- With enough knowledge and technology we can manage planet Earth
- Knowledge is increasing and by implication human goodness
- We can adequately restore that which we have dismantled

- The purpose of education is that of giving you the means for upward mobility and success
- Our culture represents the pinnacle of human achievement (Orr 1994, p. 8 and following)

The "US culture" he is writing of here is clearly a dominant story that encapsulates white supremacy, and in doing so removes human beings, at least those characterized as white, from connection to the land in deeply relational ways. He asserts, by way of contrast, that learning should be focused as follows.

3.3.2. Ecological Literacy Contrasts

- All education is environmental education (null, implicit, explicit)
- The goal of education is not mastery of subject material but of one's person
- Knowledge carries with it the responsibility to see that it is well used in the world
- We cannot say that we know something until we understand the effects of this knowledge on real people and their communities
- The importance of "minute particulars" and the power of examples over words
- The way learning occurs is as important as the content of particular courses (Orr 1994, p. 8 and following)

3.4. A Counter Story from Christianity

In the same decade that Orr was writing, Parker Palmer published *The Courage to Teach* (Palmer 1998), a book which has become a key text throughout the country in courses focused on helping people learn to teach. Indeed, it has been reprinted so often that it has both a 10th and a 20th anniversary edition. Even prior that book, however, a full decade earlier, Palmer published *To Know As We Are Known* (Palmer 1983). In his books, Palmer sought to retrieve what he identified as an ancient form of knowing rooted in the lives of the desert mothers and fathers. The writings of these people, generally understood to be Christians who lived in first few centuries following Jesus and who fled into the desert regions of what is now Egypt to form monastic communities, have become central to a retrieval of contemplative and communal forms of Christian knowing. Palmer has sought to help contemporary teachers shift their practices to embody this form of knowing he has termed "the community of truth".

Much like Orr, Palmer's arguments sought to dethrone what he labeled an "objectivist myth". His diagrams make his ideas clear, but they cannot be reprinted in this article due to copyright constraints.[7] Palmer's "community of truth" is a profoundly relational, as contrasted with relativist, way to conceptualize what it means to know. In his description, every entity knows, and even that which is known has agency: the topic or subject at the heart of our knowing impacts what we know. How we see shapes what we see, and what we see shapes how we see. To teach within this conception, within this frame of knowing, is to design spaces in which this "community of truth" can be genuinely embodied.

Palmer writes in a later book, with Arthur Zajonc, that physicist Henry Stapp believes that: "it is no longer possible even to think of the atom as a discrete entity . . . an elementary particle is not an independently existing, unanalyzable entity. It is, in essence, a set of relationships that reach outward to other things" (Palmer and Zajonc 2010, p. 26). Further, they draw on the work of philosopher of science, Ian Barbour, to suggest that: "Nature is understood now to be relational, ecological, and interdependent. Reality is constituted by events and relationships rather than separate substances or separate particles. We are now compelled to see nature as "a historical community of interdependent beings (Palmer and Zajonc 2010, p. 26)".

This profoundly interconnected, interdependent conception of reality can be linked, as Palmer suggests, to the ancient work of the desert mothers and fathers (Palmer 1983, p. 207 and following). I often offer students the "sound bite" version of Palmer's assertions by noting that "the more diverse the knowers, the more robust the knowing". This is a story about knowing, an epistemological argument, that is deeply congruent with the contrasting epistemologies shaped by First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples in North America. Indeed, some scholars believe that this conception of knowing as thoroughly

relational (not relativist), and profoundly embodied in story is a key similarity across indigenous epistemologies the world over.[8]

3.5. Mediated Stories as Entry Points into the Trauma Found in Stock Stories

What could it mean, for those of us embedded in the dominant stories of North America, to find ways to move to a more grounded—and I use that metaphor deliberately—conception of knowing? Knowing through story requires learning a series of embodied practices. Herein lies hope: hope for transformation (James and Brookfield 2014), hope for renewing relationship (Brookfield and Holst 2011), hope for leaning into the sacramentality of creation (Johnson 2014), the embodied and multi-sensory forms of knowing that can be understood as being at the very heart of Christianity (Smith 2004).

Consider the story of the two wolves with which I began this essay. Where did it come from? Who told it? In what context did I encounter it? What elements of my own already existing sense of story did it hook into? A story invites imagination, it invites "feeling with", it casts a vision for how to perceive that which is around and within you. It also narrows focus, and spotlights elements to the exclusion of other elements upon which it casts shadows.

In this third year of the COVID pandemic, Adam McKay wrote and produced a film entitled *Don't Look up* which was then sold to stream online through Netflix. This satirical comedy imagined a giant comet streaking towards the earth, certain to destroy the earth all together.[9] The film highlights the commercial success of misdirected and even patently false information, and the extent to which vast numbers of people with the structural capacity to respond to an existential threat instead are drawn into petty and self-serving dynamics. The president of the US in the film, the military advisors, the mass stream "news" anchors: all of them are in thrall to immediate polling numbers, the latest celebrity scandal, and their own personal anxieties.

As is often stated, if you cannot imagine it, it is difficult to work towards transformation. Further, if you cannot feel it, how are you to desire transformation? Stock stories numb our emotions, they hide and deny anguish, they seek to teach us that helping each other somehow harms us by creating "dependence" (Stone 2008). We have to reclaim our ability to sense and feel pain, and then to heal and grow with it. Just as the two wolves story suggests we must "feed the wolf" of joy and love, we can engage the Christian story of Jesus as one in which Jesus engages in relationship with everyone, no matter how marginalized, and as a story in which "being baptized into death" yet brings forth life.

Resmaa Menakem has described two different kinds of pain that attend trauma. He describes a traumatic event as "an incident that causes physical, emotional, spiritual, or psychological harm. The person experiencing the distressing event may feel threatened, anxious, or frightened as a result. In some cases, they may not know how to respond, or may be in denial about the effect such an event has had". In 2022, we are surrounded by traumatic events, events that are entwined with environmental injustice, with deeply oppressive relationships with creation (or the lack thereof). But Menakem describes trauma not as an endpoint, but rather as the starting point for asking how we are to heal. In doing so he suggests that there are at least two kinds of pain: "clean" pain and "dirty" pain. Clean pain is "pain that mends and can build your capacity for growth. It's the pain you feel when you know what to say or do; when you really, really don't want to say or do it; and when you do it anyway, responding from the best parts of yourself". While dirty pain is the "pain of avoidance, blame, or denial—when you respond from your most wounded parts" (Menakem 2018, p. 26).

Do dominant or stock stories help us to distinguish between clean and dirty pain? Or instead, do they seek to numb us to the pain, hide its origins, and deflect engagement with it? Might they in fact be supporting precisely the kind of "numbing" of which Brown warned? In the film *Don't Look Up*, the only hints of a different way to view reality come in brief glimpses of animals amidst the beauty of nature. In contrast, we see many examples of attempts to ignore, deny, and numb what Menakem would label "dirty" pain in the

actions of the main characters. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of dirty pain in that film, of someone who numbs themselves to reality, comes from a scientist who gets drawn into an adulterous relationship with a media celebrity rather than deal with the pain in his family.

The film concludes with a small group of people who sought unsuccessfully to intervene in the disaster, eating one final meal together and sharing their sense of the peace that can come from deep relationality, even as the comet obliterates them. It is a bleak ending, and once again reinforces the notion that it is up to individual human beings ensconced in particular structures of power to change things. It concludes that ordinary, everyday human beings have little or nothing to contribute in transformation. Yet even in that bleakness there is also a glimpse of the hope and joy that can come in sharing a simple meal, in being with loved ones. Indeed, the only depiction of religion in the whole film comes in this final scene when a millennial who has left a conservative evangelical upbringing behind offers a profound prayer. There is hope to be found here, even if it is a bleak hope, in acknowledging that we are all part of one another—indeed of all of creation.

3.6. Digital Stories as Entry Points into Resistance and Counter Stories

There are a nearly infinite number of examples of short pieces available through Youtube that offer an imagination for such hope that is deeper and vividly depicted. There are four that are particularly pertinent here.

The first is a film produced by the Bioneers,[10] with Robin Kimmerer narrating, entitled "the Honorable Harvest". In this piece, Kimmerer offers the insight of a counter story that the honorable harvest is a "covenant of reciprocity between humans and the living world". This covenant demands an understanding that the lives we are taking, when we pick plants, are the "lives of sovereign beings . . . . And in order to accept their gift we owe them at least our attention". She goes on to describe how she has been taught "never to take the first plant that you see . . . If you are going to take a life, you have to be personally accountable for it". This is a way of seeing the world, a way of knowing, that is very much part of the epistemological frames I noted earlier, within native communities. Robin Kimmerer herself is an enrolled member of the Potowatomi Nation. Her description of the "honorable harvest" also has clear resonance with the "community of truth" of which Palmer writes.

A second piece produced by The Intercept, and narrated by Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, is entitled "A Message from the Future".[11] In this short animation, Cortez imagines herself twenty years in the future, looking back on both the climate devastation wrought by humans, and also the hopeful interventions and shifts made possible when human beings organize collectively to offer universal health care, universal income, universal access to work. Hers is a profoundly political message, but one which is shaped by ideas about collective action and collective accountability. She is narrating a resistance story, one which invites an imagination that could develop into a counter story.

A third piece is an excerpt from a much longer film which is an interview with Joanna Macy.[12] In this short excerpt, she describes what it means to "befriend our despair," and in doing so talks about how we as a "planet people" are "sick in our soul". She suggests that we "need pain to alert us to what needs attention". Rather than treating pain as an "enemy to our cheerfulness", we need to understand (as does the first noble truth of Buddhism) that "there is suffering". She remembers her early childhood in the Christian church to draw out a belief that recognizing the pain of our suffering world is essential. "Pain opens the heart and the eyes so you can see the beauty." Here she is offering an example of Menakem's "clean" pain, and inviting us to see—as does Brown—how refusing to numb our emotions is crucial.

Finally, a fourth piece is a short music video by the group Birdtalker, entitled "One."[13] This song uses a poem by Rumi to narrate a string of images which ignite imagination for the heartbeat of creation, a heartbeat in which we all participate. A line from the song, "underneath what's detectable with eyes, every particle's vibrating with the one life", makes clear the interdependent, entwined nature of reality. This is my briefest but

perhaps most compelling example of a counter story rooted in this alternate epistemology, this connected and relational and accountable form of knowing.

I offer these four examples because they are diverse, grounded in wildly different spaces, and yet all four offer a narrative, a story, a vision of an inter-connected, inter-dependent world that is in sharp contrast to dominant narratives. They are available via digital media, they invite curiosity about our deep relationality, they draw on multiple senses—visual, aural—to embody their story, and they each refuse to succumb to despair.

4. Developmental Psychology for Transformation

How are we to engage stories, then, how can we help people to see "through" the satirical lens of dominant media, and to seek out and embrace resistance stories in ways that might move us into the "community of truth" of which Palmer writes, the "ecological literacy" of Orr; indeed, the contrasting epistemological frames offered by long minoritized indigenous communities that provide profound counter narratives?

To return to the biblical stories we first read in Genesis, for those of us working within Christian contexts at least, we have a set of stories that have come to be understood within a fairly narrow range of interpretations. Before we can even begin to articulate alternatives, resistance stories that might help us move to counter stories, we have to understand where people are, how they have understood what it means to be Christian, particularly as part of or in relation to Creation. This is urgent work that demands that we understand working at the level of heart knowledge, not simply cognitive ideas. This is work that demands transformation in the ways we know.

Robert Kegan, a constructive developmental psychologist, is eloquent about how transformation of meaning-making unfolds in adult life. He has demonstrated that adult learning and development proceeds in a spiral fashion that can be identified as "confirmation, contradiction, continuity" (Kegan 1982, p. 123 and following). He and his colleagues have documented different forms of meaning-making that can develop in adulthood. Of specific interest here are the shifts they have observed when people move from what they have labelled a "socialized mind with cross-categorical meanings" to a "self-authoring mind capable of complex systemic" meaning-making. At least for people who carry one or more of the identity markers that confer privilege in our systems of dominance (gender, race, age, ability, economic status, education, and so on), it is a "self-authoring mind" that needs to be cultivated to be able both to see these systems and begin to construct ways beyond them.[14] It is a "self-authoring" mind that invites relational accountability, and offers the capacity to embody such.

As an example, if you are watching the 2022 commercial for streaming services I described earlier, could you differentiate between the experience of joy and curiosity you might experience in engaging stories in such digital streams while at the same time acknowledging the tenuous relationship with the outdoors that is being depicted? If connection to the outdoors truly is to bring connection and joy, how might you be fully present to it? Holding awareness of both at the same time is a deeply challenging stance that emerges within a self-authoring mind.[15] In a similar dynamic, is it possible to engage the stories of Genesis—particularly of the Garden of Eden, of the Fall, of the expulsion from the Garden—as deep truths and at the same time enter into the awe and wonder evoked by scientific explanations of the Big Bang, and the ever expanding and evolving Cosmos?

In the worlds in which the biblical stories first arose as compelling truths, in the social spaces of oral culture, all that we can glean at this many centuries of distance from their first telling suggests that a deep relationship with Creation was the center and heartbeat of that imagination (Johnson 2014; Jennings 2010). When Palmer writes of a "community of truth" that centers on learning a topic, a subject such that that topic, that subject, has real subjectivity and agency itself, he is echoing in the language of rationalist western culture, something that appears to me, at least, to be deeply rooted in the epistemological frames, the stories and practices, of so many indigenous peoples.

Robin Kimmerer (trained in the western practices of environmental and forest biology, and also an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation) is one of the few teacher/scholars I have encountered who is able to speak in these disparate languages (Kimmerer 2013). Her description of the "honorable harvest" I noted above in the short video, offers the two frames side by side, or perhaps intermingled, in a way that bridges some of the distance that might be perceived between them, while at the same time lifting up the essential moral convictions embedded in indigenous epistemologies.[16] Palmer is seeking a similar moral conviction, when he urges readers to recognize that "we know as we are known" by a God who is relational within God's very self, in the social Trinity. So, too, Pope Francis when he urges "care for our common home" (Pope Francis 2015).

Why does this matter to environmental education in religious settings?

Joanna Macy is quoted by ter Kuile (2020) as noting four metaphors for describing our relationship with creation:

> The first is to think of the world as a battlefield in which the forces of good fight the forces of evil. In this frame of mind, the earth is a resource to be mined and shaped to meet our human desires . . . .
>
> Macy identifies the second paradigm as viewing the world as a trap.
>
> Instead, argues Macy, we might think of the world as our lover. "When you see the world as lover, every being, every phenomenon, can become an expression of that ongoing, erotic impulse . . .
>
> The fourth and final paradigm Macy invites us into is seeing the world as self. No longer is nature something outside of us, a landscape for us to admire or even to love—instead, we are nature. (quote in ter Kuile 2020, pp. 142–46)

This is a description that, at a minimum, comes from a "self-authoring mind", perhaps it even stretches into what Kegan calls a "self-transforming mind".[17]

Do those psychological labels matter? Only if we can use them as a way to deepen our empathy for the learning challenges we are facing in doing environmental education entwined with religious education. As Kegan notes, transformative learning proceeds from confirmation through contradiction and beyond **only if and when sufficient continuity is present**. What can offer such continuity? What are the resources, the stories, we can use that will hold us in such a way that we can perceive the contradictions we face without descending into despair? Can we find our way into these forms of knowing that offer hope in the midst of climate catastrophe? Is there a way to be present to our pain, to refuse to ignore or deny what is going on all around us, and instead to live into deep relational accountability?

In this third year of the global pandemic, I want to recall the early months, the summer of 2020, when most of the world was enduring some form of stark lockdown. The enforced physical separation led many of us to mourn what we were losing when our relational patterns were so sharply disrupted. There was a short video spreading wildly, circulating "like a virus" in March of 2020 entitled "#ASCOLTATE #LISTEN—a letter from the virus". Since then, many, many different versions of a "communication from the virus" have been created and shared. One I particularly like is by a group called Sustainable Humans and is entitled "What might we learn from COVID".[18] These pieces which ignited imagination and drew global attention (as evidenced by their wide sharing),[19] imagined the virus as having subjectivity, as acting with intent, the intent being to force humans to slow down, to pause, to quiet ourselves, and to listen to all that we are doing that is harming the earth and its inhabitants. These videos urge us to see human beings intimately bound up with all of creation; to see, as Macy suggests, that "we are nature".

That same summer, in May of 2020, George Floyd was murdered by a police officer near my hometown in Minneapolis, Minnesota. As the urgent uprising following that murder unfolded, and as the funerals and memorials began, many people remarked on how the video that 17-year-old Darnella Frazier filmed as the murder unfolded captured

the attention of a nation in lockdown. There was surprise that people were able to focus, to listen, to sense their own anguish and outrage at what was happening, and recognition that that awareness was possible precisely because so many people were bereft of their usual entertainment distractions. The Rev. Al Sharpton, in offering words at George Floyd's memorial in Minneapolis that June of 2020, noted that we are "in a different time, a different season".[20] He was doing a riff on the Ecclesiastes 3 text, and urging people in the midst of a time of COVID disruption, to use the space created by not having popular entertainment to distract us, to use that space to focus a spotlight on the brutality and systemic racism embedded in our systems of policing.

This season—of COVID, of global uprising in relation to racial injustice—has perhaps disrupted our dominant stories just enough for us to long for a different way to view the world, to long for a different form of knowing.

Confirmation, Contradiction, Continuity

In helping us to understand how to support transformative learning with adults, Kegan writes of confirmation, contradiction, continuity. The pandemic brought huge disruptions and exposed deep contradictions in our meaning-making. In some ways, it has created room by stopping us in our tracks, and alerting us to what can happen when we care for each other. Yes, there has been tremendous injustice, hatred, fear, and outrage provoked by this virus. But there has also been renewed awareness of our connections to the natural world. There was already attention being brought to the power of "forest bathing," of "spending time in nature," of rebuilding broken connections prior to the pandemic (Hari 2020), a process which the enforced physical isolation of the pandemic only accelerated.

The pandemic has renewed awareness of the joy of simply being outside, of short walks in a neighborhood, of creating things by hand, and of course, of the deep joy that can come from re-connecting after a time of loss and isolation. It has also, at the same time, brought attention to the plight of those who do not have the privilege of spending joy-filled time outdoors, people who are isolated by their health, by their socioeconomic status, by the conditions of their employment or lack thereof. And perhaps most of all, it has brought attention to those who are unhoused, those who are outside because they have no choice but to be outside.

Such complex storytelling is not only joy-filled storytelling about the outdoors, but rather storying that recognizes the dangerous, anxiety-provoking, anguished lives of those on the margins of our economies. I suspect that some of those stories were told, at least in dominant media streams, because there was finally a recognition of how inter-connected we are, of how much public health is shaped not by the most secure but by the most vulnerable among us. Religious educators need to pick up on and highlight the interconnected relationality evoked here, rather than the fear-mongering and shame of telling these stories as "stock" or dominant stories.

The many and diverse realities of living within a global pandemic offer us elements of what it means to be human that we can "confirm," to use Kegan's language, and in doing so expose the "contradictions" (again, Kegan's language) that are visible when racial injustice is filmed and shared widely, when a pandemic reaches into all corners of the globe and makes clear the inequities and injustice that are pervasive. Our task is now to provide the "continuity" that can nourish transformation. This is the work of so many communities, and an increasing number of authors who are calling us back into relationship, who are demanding that we see our interdependence and the intimate connections we share, as necessary (Ayres 2020). They are offering us "continuity" in Kegan's frame. We are coming to recognize that religious education, that environmental education, must embed us in alternative epistemological frames. The continuity we need to face these contradictions, the ways of knowing the world that can help us to embody deep relationality, have been here all along if only we listen deeply enough.

We must find and share resistance stories, and begin to build up counter stories that draw us into deep empathy, into collective action, into hope even in the midst of climate catastrophe and the despair it can provoke. These are stories that we can draw from deep within our religious traditions, they are stories we can glean, interpretations we can invite, from deep within the history of our tradition, offering continuity and hope (Fleischer and DeMoor 2015). In order to do so, we must bring the "null" curriculum into the light, into focus. We need to ensure that our "explicit" and our "implicit" curricula are aligned with each other, and that the forms of knowing we are nurturing are deeply connected to these relational and profoundly grounded frames.

The power of these widely shared stories—the "letter from the virus" and Darnella Frazier's recording—is clear in what has since unfolded. The challenge to us, in religious communities in particular, is to offer the continuity that can sustain that transformation, that can connect these stories to our traditions, to what we might want to retrieve from the past, to the hope and the faith that creates room for these transformations. That continuity cannot come from dominant frames of knowing, but demands that we retrieve—and learn from other communities—forms of knowing that are thoroughly relational, rooted in a "community of truth." and deeply interdependent.

Having ignited curiosity about alternative frames for seeing, and curating good resources for deepening and sustaining those perceptions, it is crucial to share practices that embody these frames, that strengthen and root and ground them. The first step is in the basic process of "confirmation," following beyond that into "contradiction" and "continuity."

In the rest of this essay, I want to share some of what we are doing in my own contexts, again, not as prescriptive but as evocative examples that I hope will ignite your imagination, offer ways to find and curate good resources, and that can shape practices of storying.

5. Practices That Support Shifting Meaning Frames, That Invite Transformation

5.1. Story Exercises That Begin in Confirmation

Far too many of us are socialized primarily by the stock or dominant stories of white supremacy, of neoliberal capitalism, of narrow forms of rationality taught in higher education. Shifting the underlying epistemologies to meaning-making frames that emphasize, interdependence, and accountability begins in offering respect and care for the persons whose storying we are trying to shift. It is often remarked upon that one of the most sacred practices we can engage in is deep listening. Or, as community organizers note: people do not care what you know, until they know that you care. Yet we are not often taught how to embody such a practice, and certainly the stock/dominant story processes that surround us emphasize disbelief and criticism, rather than careful listening. The first set of exercises I offer here are exercises that invite practices of attention, practices that are multi-sensory, practices that can lead to deeper relationship.

5.1.1. Learning to Breathe

The global pandemic, and renewed attention to police brutality have heightened our attention to our breath. "I can't breathe" are often the last words of people held under the knees of police brutality. "I can't breathe" is also all too often a symptom of the oxygen depletion caused by the SARS-CoV2 virus and its many mutations.

Learning to breathe deeply, learning to recognize when our breath has become shallow—perhaps due to anger, or fear, or outrage—is a very first step. We know, deep in our core, that we can live for days without food, for perhaps a day without water, but not even ten minutes without breath. Breath is the gift of oxygen synthesized by the plant and algae life all around us, the gift scientists have labelled "photosynthesis." Doing something as simple as paying attention one's breath is a first place to begin to embody forms of knowing that are open to our interdependence with all of creation, and Menakem offers multiple ways to practice such attention in the midst of our pain. He shares ways to refuse to numb our emotions but rather to learn with and from them (2018).

5.1.2. Chanting to Sing

Anyone who has learned to sing knows how important breath is to singing. A simple way to invite attention to breath beyond the practices already mentioned, is to draw people into a chant. I am fond of the Julian of Norwich phrase "all will be well, all will be well, and all manner of things will be well." When you chant it in a two-tone phrase it can become a round, and is easily picked up and shared by people. An experience of shared song, in this simple and connected process, invites wonder and eagerness to keep learning. It "confirms" a simple reality of connection.

5.1.3. Acknowledging the Land upon Which You Learn

Land acknowledgements are a tiny, a very small, first step in inviting awareness of the ground upon which we stand in learning. Worked out in concert with members of local native communities, a land acknowledgement can be a good practice in beginning, in grounding people for whatever learning event is to unfold.[21] Such a practice confirms a given context, a shared place, with openness to the painful histories that are inscribed there.

5.1.4. Mindful Walking

There are many, many invitations spread across multiple religious communities to practice "mindful walking." Perhaps one of the more frequently shared comes from the work of Thich Nhat Hanh, he of blessed memory, who wrote a piece in the Buddhist magazine *Tricycle* describing this practice.[22] This practice, like the others named above, is focused being present to one's immediate space. It builds capacity for feeling with, not simply "thinking about."

5.1.5. Digging in Dirt

One of the exercises that was shared with me, years ago when I first ventured into the rural environs of Minnesota, came from the Rev. Dr. Mark Yackel-Juleen (2021), who put down a hula hoop on the ground of the "prairie pothole" in which we were standing at the time, and helped us to see more than 100 species (grasses, insects, small animals) present in that small space. Learning that dirt, that the earthen soil in which our food is grown, is itself a widely varied ecology, is itself a profoundly powerful counter story. Far from the "dirt" which I learned as a child must be swept away, cleaned off, hosed down, not tracked into the house, "soil" is a living organism upon which all of our lives depend. This is actually an example of a practice that begins in "confirmation," by inviting people to be present to the land upon which they stand, but then builds into "contradiction" by asking participants to wonder about our living relationship with this dirt/soil.

5.1.6. Attentive Seeing

Another exercise I frequently use with students is to send them out on a walk through the neighborhood, wherever we are located (whether in a church, a seminary, a campsite) with their phone cameras, and then to ask them to take pictures of anything they see that catches their attention. Next I ask them to walk the same path again, looking for things that do not do so. That is, I ask them first to take photos of beauty, and then to go back and take pictures of things they see that they think are ugly, or at least that their eyes skipped over on the first walk. We bring these photos back into a shared setting, put them up on a screen, and meditate on them together. Where can we see God in these photos? What is in the frame of the camera, and what was left out? Many people think they are taking a picture of something only to look at the photo itself and realize how much was left out, or is not visible. Bringing context to these images invites stories of the walk around, which in turn invites a deeper awareness of what it means to "see" in new ways. Many educators have written about "place-based learning" which clearly has roots in indigenous epistemologies, whether acknowledged as such or not (Sobel 1996, 2004; Leslie et al. 1999; Sterling 2001; Litchfield 2019).

5.1.7. Tracing Water Pathways

The Capitol Region Watershed, a local government entity here where I live, has worked with local churches to develop a curriculum called "Wade in the Water" that helps young people to trace the ways water moves in their community, and to see what feeds that water and what is fed into it that is destructive.[23] Water holds such a powerful place in religious imagination, across multiple traditions, and is an easily accessible entry point into awareness of interdependence.

5.1.8. Listening to Sound (an Exercise in Sonic Environments)

"Create/share/believe" is a circle I often describe as an instantiation of the social Trinity, and when drawn upon for religious education it is a recognition and embrace of our creative "maker" cultures (Hess 2014). The following three exercises become environmentally aware when the prompts used invite stories about relationship with creation.

So many of us have grown accustomed to creating the sonic spaces in which we live by curating music on our phones and keeping that music on all around us, such that it becomes a background for existence and we find it increasingly difficult to be quiet, to inhabit stillness. This exercise is described at length in *Engaging Technology in Theological Education* (Hess 2005, pp. 136–39). The learning goal is to invite people to attend to the ways in which music shapes their emotional senses, and to begin to learn how to listen more deeply. Once people have done the sonic exercise, it can invite conversation about stillness, about quiet, and about what the sounds all around us might be inviting us to hear: whether they are city sounds drowning out any other sounds, or they are the whisper of wind, the creak of insects, and the calls of birds.

5.1.9. Story Listening in Circle

This is an exercise (described at length in *Becoming a White Antiracist*, Brookfield and Hess 2021, pp. 66–83), in which people are invited to sit in groups of four and take turns telling a brief story based on a shared prompt. Each, in turn, then reflects on the story through attending to the feelings, the actions, and the values evoked. It is a way to slow people down to listen to themselves through the ears of others.

5.1.10. Story Listening through Titling

This is another exercise (described at length in *Becoming a White Antiracist*), that invites short story sharing in a circle, where the listening results in proposing various titles for the story. Again, it creates an opportunity to listen closely and build capacity through a process that is in itself enjoyable.

5.2. Story Paths for Confronting and Contradicting Stock Stories and Igniting Resistance

Having developed some basic practices of story listening and sharing, demonstrating respect in a circle, "confirming" if you will, the reality of the people with whom you are learning, it is necessary to move to widen and deepen awareness through contradicting the more narrow and oppressive dominant/stock stories in which we find ourselves (Schroeter 2019).

It is in listening to, engaging, learning from the stories of indigenous communities that those of us who are thoroughly shaped by stock stories can begin to hear what has been concealed from us in ways that nurture resistance. There are so many opportunities to learn from leaders in First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities, to learn from the indigenous peoples who have long tended this earth, and from many other minoritized communities.

The field of religious education has focused more recently on this kind of storytelling, and there are numerous scholars working in this area. I would highlight in particular the work of Kim-Cragg (2015, 2019); Tran (2017); Parker (2003); Smith (2004); Baker (2010); and Kaunda and Sang-man (2021).

Here in Minnesota the project "Healing Minnesota Stories" (https://healingmnstories.wordpress.com accessed on 1 February 2022) invites people to participate in sacred site pilgrimages led by native guides. These experiential learning events draw people into

direct contact with the ground upon which they stand, and then share the stories deeply held by the native communities who have tended that ground.

Film and video streaming have also begun to offer many and varied ways to hear stories that have been concealed by stock/dominant voices, and to begin to learn the stories of resistance without unduly burdening or triggering trauma by constantly asking persons who have been minoritized to share their stories. These are projects that have been created precisely to share stories. Here are just a handful that we use regularly here in Minnesota, but I would encourage you to be in contact with the indigenous communities in your own lands for ideas and resources.

- "Dakota38", a film (full film made available online: https://youtu.be/1pX6FBSUyQI, accessed on 1 February 2022)
- "Say Your Name", a short music video about boarding schools sung by Keith Secola (https://youtu.be/1UftaoCvMxc, accessed on 1 February 2022)
- "Proud to be", a PSA created by the National Congress of American Indians to fight some of the NFL mascot battles. It remains a powerful resistance story (https://youtu.be/mR-tbOxlhvE, accessed on 1 February 2022)
- "We Shall Remain", a short film by the Stylehorse Collective in collaboration with tribal youth programs in Idaho (https://youtu.be/1pX6FBSUyQI, accessed on 1 February 2022)
- "Grace", a poem written and read by poet laureate Joy Harjo (https://youtu.be/dualpWSuT3I, accessed on 1 February 2022)
- More than a single story website (https://morethanasinglestory.com, accessed on 1 February 2022)
- The National Native American Boarding Schools Coalition (https://boardingschoolhealing.org, accessed on 1 February 2022)
- ROCO films (a documentary film production company) (https://rocofilms.com, accessed on 1 February 2022)
- The Hartley Media Impact Initiative (https://auburnseminary.org/hartley/, accessed on 1 February 2022)
- Adam Mazo and Mishy Lesser at the Upstander Project (https://upstanderproject.org/dawnland, accessed on 1 February 2022)

5.3. Creating Counter Stories for Building Self in Deep Relation to the Earth (Continuity)

As noted earlier in this essay, the goal of shifting our storying, the learning frame necessary for coming into deep relationality, for coming to "see ourselves as nature" (Macy), for coming into a "reciprocal covenant" (Kimmerer), requires offering continuity that supports people as they move through the contradictions, many of which are deeply painful and guilt producing, that arise when opening up to wider awareness.

I am reluctant to offer too many examples in this category because I know I am myself so deeply embedded in dominant/stock stories that I find it most helpful to stand with humility and listen to my native siblings as they offer their stories. I have been deeply impacted by authors such as Louise Erdrich, Robin Kimmerer, Peter Razor, Drew Haden Taylor, Diane Wilson, and so on.

I do want to point, however, to contemplative traditions in Christianity, which have in many ways kept alive a respect for and engagement with forms of knowing that are not narrowly rationalist (Smith and Higginbotham 2019). These are the streams which Parker Palmer has drawn on. Maggie Ross in her book *Silence: A User's Guide*, writes of a form of knowing, of knowledge, that arises in "drinking from the well of silence" (Ross 2014). Willie James Jennings (2010), in narrating the many paths Christianity took to create and enforce racialization, notes that there are other paths, roads less traveled, that are evident in the glimpses we still have of Christians who did not perceive such a stark separation between humans and animals, between Creation and ourselves.

I am often struck by how many of my students are deeply connected to yoga, or find certain kinds of Buddhist meditation powerful, but have no idea that similar embodied practices of prayer exist within Christian traditions as well. Often the best way I know

to help young adults begin to imagine how Christianity might be a resource for them, is to introduce them to the embodied practices, the rituals, pilgrimages, shrines, and other elements I can draw on within my Roman Catholic community.

6. Concluding Notes

I want to conclude by reiterating that we are storying people. To transform our practices in the midst of climate catastrophe, we must transform our stories. And to do that we must transform the very ways in which we come to know. That process, at least for those of us who have been thoroughly socialized into dominant stories, requires a spiral process of "confirmation, contradiction, and continuity", drawing us ever more deeply into a mutual covenant of relationality and reciprocity. Such a covenant has been embodied and embraced for millennia by indigenous communities, from whom all of us have so very much to learn. Stepping into such deep and accountable relationality is a process that demands that we open ourselves up to a full range of emotions, and that we not numb ourselves to the pain that arises when we are honest about the climate catastrophe we face. First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples lead the way here, helping us to see that we are all part of one another.

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Notes

1 Like many stories from oral cultures, it is difficult to cite the "first" evidence of this story. The Wikipedia article on the story is regularly updated: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_Wolves, accessed on 1 February 2022.

2 One of the more profound articulations of this other way of interpreting Christianity, with a particularly pertinent congruence to the issues discussed in this essay, is Pope Francis'2015 encyclical *Laudato 'Si: On Care for Our Common Home*.

3 A good collection of the growing research on this issue can be found at Harvard's T. H. Chan School of Public Health (https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/c-change/subtopics/coronavirus-and-climate-change/, accessed on 1 February 2022).

4 Please note that I am thoroughly aware that other religious traditions have powerful ways to speak to these realities as well. I am simply seeking to stay specific to my social location.

5 Here again the Wikipedia article is useful as it points off to multiple popular culture "takes" on this story.

6 See for instance, Erin Magner, https://www.wellandgood.com/spirit-animal-native-american/ (accessed on 1 February 2022).

7 On a side note, the reality that certain elements of his argument cannot be reproduced due to copyright restrictions is a small, but powerful, element of the larger argument in which his work is embedded.

8 A particularly powerful and useful guide to such work on indigenous forms of knowing has been made available in an open textbook format: *Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers* by Asma-na-hi Antoine; Rachel Mason; Roberta Mason; Sophia Palahicky; and Carmen Rodriguez de France is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

9 More credits for the film are available online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don%27t_Look_Up (accessed on 1 February 2022).

10 https://bioneers.org/about/purpose/ (accessed on 1 February 2022), and then the link to the video: https://youtu.be/cEm7gbIax0o (accessed on 1 February 2022).

11 The Intercept (https://theintercept.com/about/, accessed on 1 February 2022), https://youtu.be/cEm7gbIax0o (accessed on 1 February 2022).

12 You can access the interview with Macy here: https://youtu.be/7fnEUhZIirw (accessed on 1 February 2022).

13 Birdtalker: https://youtu.be/Odlw8WdsZS8 (accessed on 1 February 2022).

14 I am writing in this article from a very specific location, but I would note here that Walker and Cariaga (2021) offer an important corrective to this theory by lifting up ways in which hybrid cultural identities must be recognized and engaged.

15 Kegan and associates have also identified a fifth space of meaning-making, something they term a "self-transforming mind". That frame could be even more conducive to managing the contradictory stories here, but few adults ever get that far in the spiral of adult development.

16 For a lengthier treatment of these ideas, her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* is a wonderful read.

17 In a different discursive terrain Hanchin and Hearlson (2020) suggest that what we need is an "ecological and psychic conversion" (p. 258 and following).

[18] Originally created in March of 2020 (https://youtu.be/UEgl_TUYOZo accessed on 1 February 2022), many, many versions of the same idea have been created and shared since then. One I particularly like comes from the Sustainable Humans group: https://youtu.be/XELczQ3JWQY (accessed on 1 February 2022).

[19] Note Jenkins et al. (2013) and their work on "spreadable media" as contrasted with the slang of "viral" media.

[20] Visible here at about the 1:46 mark: https://youtu.be/3egsimHziWg (accessed on 1 February 2022).

[21] There is much wisdom available as to how to craft such an acknowledgement, beginning with connecting with local native communities. Basic information can be found here: https://usdac.us/nativeland (accessed on 1 February 2022).

[22] Available here: https://tricycle.org/magazine/walk-buddha/ (accessed on 1 February 2022).

[23] The curriculum is free to download and available here: http://growinggreenhearts.com/stories/wade-in-the-water-curriculum-for-community/ (accessed on 1 February 2022).

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