

# COMMON DREAMS

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## CONFERENCE PAPER



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### KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

*Sacred Web: Nature and Neighbour as  
The Stage of the Divine*

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## SACRED WEB: NATURE AND NEIGHBOUR AS THE STAGE OF THE DIVINE

Today, I want to focus on a question – and the question is: Where is God? I have come to the opinion that across western culture people are no longer asking theological questions about who is God, or what is God doing, but rather the question of God's *location*; instead of the question of God's nature, or the question of God's intention. The question of God's *location* is one of the primary cultural questions that we are surrounded by in Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand, places where we can say that this is the post-Christendom era.



Now, I wish to introduce you to this chap, this God, the great God of the vertical universe who sits atop a three-tiered structure of that universe where our ancestors viewed all of creation as structured in these three layers, and sometimes they got very complex about it, creating sorts of multiple layers within each layer. I have seen drawings of the renderings of the multi-tiered universe from the Middle Ages with as many as sixteen or eighteen different layers in it. But, the three main tiers in it were the same – there was Heaven, then Earth where we are, and Hell, the underworld below our feet. This makes some sense of this God. That God is far off; that God oversees this whole structure of the universe.



God created that three-tiered structure, and that, here on earth, living gradual, short lives, we humans have a problem, and that is - Where will we be forever? Is this life here on earth all that there is? And so, religion developed in a very interesting way. Religion developed to navigate the gap between Heaven and Hell. To answer the question – What happens after earthly life? Where do we go?

Not all religions did this. There were plenty of religions that stayed focused on the *horizontal*. Here in Australia, we acknowledge that we are standing on aboriginal land. These first peoples had a more *horizontal* perspective. There are the native peoples of North America with whom I am most familiar. I grew up partly in Arizona, and have friends who are Navajo, and their religion was not that terribly concerned with this three-tiered model. They were really more concerned with the middle tier.

However, many other religions formed across the planet, and across time, that were interested in the other tiers of the universe. How do we go to be with God of the gods?

Christianity developed a very particular structure for this. I call this the *Holy Elevator*.



- For the **Baptists** the Word of God has been put in.

You get the point! So, whoever is standing there as the *Holy Elevator* operator has gone to *Holy Elevator* operator school. They take the thing out of the elevator, turn around to the eager and waiting people who are standing here on earth and need to hear about their eternal destiny, and then they say something to the effect of –

- *Take, eat, and do this in remembrance of me! or,*
- *Listen to the Word of God well preached! or,*
- *Obey!*

And, if we do that, then, when we die, that *Holy Elevator* operator will usher us into the elevator. They will not stand there with us, but, they will just reach around the corner and push the ‘up-button’. Some people get the ‘down-button’ pushed, but one of the things that is interesting for the last hundred years or so is that most liberal Christians put tape over the ‘down-button’. We’ve generally kept the button there reserving it for special cases like Adolf Hitler. So you can take the tape off once in a while and press the ‘down-button’ if need be, but for the most part, the tape is over the button.

Now, you can really understand what is going on here with this structure, one that has this ‘up and down’ dimension. God sending stuff to us, and us wanting to go up to God, and not go down to Hell.

But, all of the sort of the accoutrements of the elevator just do not function well because we no longer structure the universe in these three vertical tiers. Instead, we structure the universe like this:

And, if you think about this as the structure of Christianity, a structure which many of us have either rebelled against; or perhaps are struggling with; or maybe have finally just put away as part of our past. If we look at the *Holy Elevator*, religion, the church, denominations, and theology begin to make some sense. God is up there and we are here. What happens in Christianity is that God, who is sitting up here, puts stuff in the elevator, and sends stuff down to us. Then, at the door of the elevator, when the elevator door comes open, there has to be someone there who can handle whatever comes out of the elevator, because, who knows, whatever God put in that elevator. The contents could be on fire, so there has to be a special class of *Holy Elevator* operators, standing at the door, at the ready, to pull out whatever God has put in:

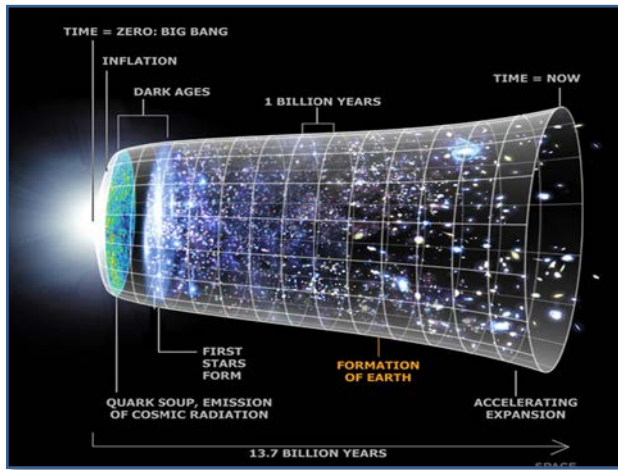
God might have put in a **sacred text**.

God might have put in a **list of rules**.

God might have put in **some bread and some wine**, or maybe,

God might have put in **a few more sacraments**: It might depend on what denomination you are.

- If you are a **Catholic** God might have sent down seven.
- The **Anglican** elevator has two, maybe three. It is a little hard to tell about the Anglicans.
- The **Lutheran** elevator has grace alone and beer.
- I am never sure about that **Calvinist** elevator, because I think that only people who are especially chosen can **see** the elevator.



Now, this is a drawing of the structure of the universe from the University of Cambridge Department of Cosmology. You can find this diagram on the web. And, so, the question, I think, becomes rather obvious – How to we restructure? How do we think about faith, spirituality, God, life of community, Church, the Synagogue, whatever, in relationship to **this structure**?

Now you see why people are asking the question – Where is God? Because everybody knew where God was in the vertical structure, and everybody knew how to access God via the elevator. But, here, in this picture of the universe – Where is God? It is fascinating to me that spiritual leaders around the world are beginning to model a different type of cosmology. We can see this kind of model emerging and the enthusiasm some of these leaders create as they begin to speak of, and call us into, this different way of being.



I think that this photograph is fascinating. This fellow, of course, is the Pope. If anybody gets to operate a *Holy Elevator* it is he. He even got to ride the *Holy Elevator* right up to its highest levels. But this Pope has chosen not to do that. Instead, this Pope is known for coming down, just being with

people. Here is a picture of Pope Francis inside of a Cathedral.

Of course, he did “Pope-type” things. He did a Mass, but nobody takes pictures of that. This is where the energy is. Young adults, anybody really who can get this close with their cell phone, this is what they are doing. They are making their own icons. They are not even waiting for somebody to produce a *holy souvenir* of this moment, so that they can go off and purchase it from another place. Instead, they literally grab their phones, and stand next to the guy himself and take a picture. And, they are going to carry that around on their cell phone, and look back and remember, and be recalled to this *holy moment* when they were standing with Pope Francis.

Then, there is this chap:



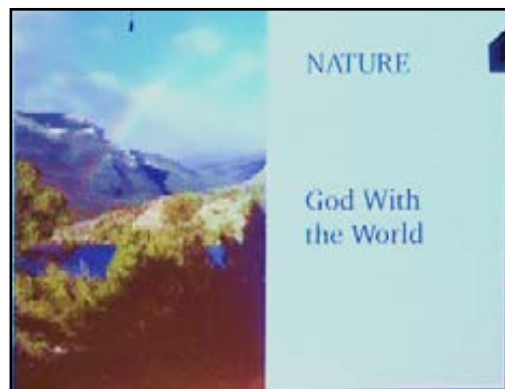
By any rights, he could live up on a mountain, but he has chosen instead to come down from the mountain, and wander around the world preaching peace, and helping us all to a greater sense of contemplation of humanity, and of connection. The Dalai Lama has been a witness to a rearranged non-hierarchical, non-vertical view of God, of the universe, of our hearts, of our lives, of sacredness.

Then, of course, there is the person who I think might well be the smartest spiritual leader across the globe. Indeed, when the Pope was in Washington DC last year, there was a survey of global religion writers, and those surveyed were asked to say which people were the most powerful religious figures in the world:

- *Number One* was Pope Francis,
- *Number Three* was the Dalai Lama,
- *Number Two* was **Oprah Winfrey**.



What is becoming clearer is – It is time to say “goodbye”, and replace this image of God with other kinds of images of God, and ask ourselves the question – Where is God?



In *Grounded* I do that. It is really a book about what I see, and what I think my neighbours, my friends, and people who are near to my life, are seeing as well. Where is God? Many people I know talk about seeing God in nature, in the natural world, and also, many people see God in their neighbours.



Last Fall Oprah Winfrey had a show which was a seven night series in the United States. I am sure it has been shown in other countries too by now. It was titled *Belief*. What was fascinating about it was, that it was a survey of world religions. But, what it wasn't was Oprah getting up, and standing up in front of a blackboard, telling us what the points of doctrine were of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Christianity in its various forms. Instead, it was a team taking cameras out across the world telling stories about regular people who were finding new paths of meaning through ancient faiths. It was not about doctrinal belief. It was about what we “be-love in our hearts” (Marcus Borg) – what we are devoted to, what transforms us. It was an extraordinary show.

Actually the billboard from Los Angeles to advertise the Oprah Winfrey's show had on it “We are connected”. These days we see those words regularly, don't we?



Here, at *Common Dreams*, we have been asking ourselves for the last couple of days a question – What do you see? Where are the horizons that are beckoning you? Where is God for you now? And, somehow we are gathering up the answers we have out of our experience and we are holding hands, and from what we see, something is becoming clearer.

I am actually very fond of this slide. The first iteration of this slide I happened to show when another writer was in the room with me, a fellow by the name of Brian McLaren. We are good friends. We used to live very close to one another, and we talk about our books while we are writing them. So, this day Brian was in the room when I showed this slide.

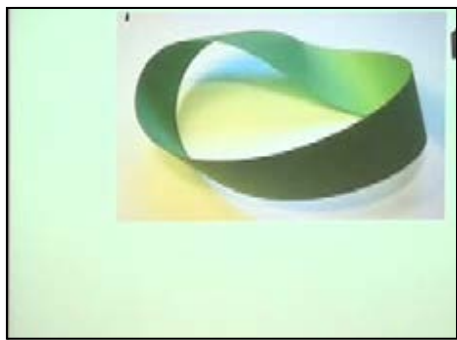
He said, "I don't like it!"

And, I said, "What don't you like?"

What he didn't like was I had the line "God with us"!

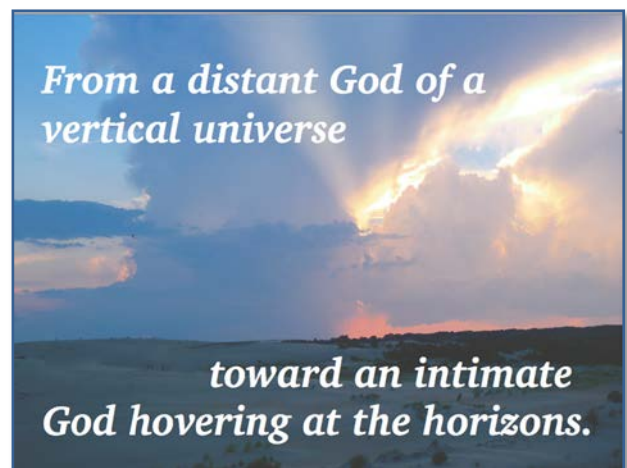
He said, "Don't you realize Diana that when you put a line like "God with us" that people will think that God is not with them." It dawned on me, and I said, "You are so right. I am glad you told me that because God is with **all of us!**"

That is what I mean by **neighbourliness** – not just **us!**



Now these two things here – what I think they are doing is forming a **Möbius strip** [a surface with one continuous side formed by joining the ends of a rectangle after twisting one end through 180°] of sacredness in which we find each other. I did not know it when *Grounded* came out last October. I had been writing that book a year or a year and a half before. So, I am sitting in Virginia. I am working on my book, and I am trying to figure out what I see, and what my neighbours are seeing; what my friends are telling me that they are seeing; gathering up stories and putting those into a narrative. What I didn't know was that Pope Francis was writing a book about the same thing. It is entitled, *Laudato Si*. Seeing that he is the Pope, he gets to write in Latin. In that book he talks about a *sacred ecology*, and that is the exact phrase that I used in *Grounded*, and I did not copy. He talks about the *sacred ecology* in which our

lives play out, and where God's divine activity is occurring. He talks about the *sacred ecology* of the natural world of the environment, and of the *sacred ecology* of the economy of human relationships and of human structure. And, in *Laudato Si* he talks about how these two things have to remain together, and are part of a **whole**. The original meaning of the word "catholic" was not "one" but "whole", "entire". The catholic church is about a "wholeness"; a *sacred ecology* in which we human beings are swept into all of creation with a divine vocation, not of dominion, but of oversight, to watch over, to guard, to care for, to till, and to keep this beautiful earth that we know as home – **nature and neighbour**, a holy and sacred environment, **a catholic community**.



Now, I have this slide up. In *Grounded*, I talk about a switch from this distant God in a far off place – that's where transcendence is above us – towards this – a shift to a God who is hovering on the horizons of life all around us – that we are in the picture, that God is in the picture, and this, of course, is what we describe as *Panentheism*.

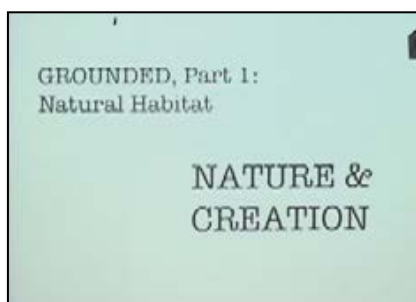


This painting is the ultimate theological statement about Western Christianity. There is God and there is Adam, and there is a distance and there is an elevation. God is above, and the human being is below. And the two don't touch! That gap is the entire history of Western theology. How big that gap is, and how to get over that gap, is the important discussion. The new cosmology is moving us towards this:



No gap – integration, intimacy, wholeness.

Very quickly I would like to go through *nature and neighbour* – a few comments on each one of these things to get our minds thinking, so that we will be prepared to go into our breakout groups to consider how God is present; if God is present; where God is, in each of these things in your lives, in the lives of the people you know, or if not.



The first part of the book *Grounded* is referred to as *Natural Habitat*. And, it begins with an iconic story, one that is being experienced quite frequently across Western culture right now.

One morning, I was in Santa Barbara, California, in a place very close to my heart, and, because I was still on east coast time, I woke up really early, even though I am not usually an early morning person. It was 5.00 am and I decided to go for a walk. I was walking along the beach in Santa Barbara, and here is a photograph of the sunrise that morning:



I took my cell phone out of my pocket and took pictures of what was all around me. This picture is of an extraordinarily beautiful sunrise as you can see. It's a bit unusual. The sun is not actually coming up. But the light is coming between these interesting layers of cloud. And those clouds were mirrored in the tide that was very unusual on the beach. This is not a retouched photo. These are the exact colours of dawn that morning. It was like walking into a black and white, or maybe a sepia-coloured antique photo. It was astonishingly beautiful. In the midst of all this, I did something that I did not anticipate. While I was looking at this, feeling the whole of the environment, feeling the air, and listening to the sound of the birds – the whole thing – I fell to my knees, and I said, "Thank you!" And, then, without realising I had done it! I went prostrate on the beach! I wanted every part of my body to touch the water, and the earth, and the sky. ***I wanted to be inside of this picture!***

I opened the first section of *Grounded* with this story because it was so unexpected. But, it was also *iconic*. You may have had this same experience walking on a beach here in Queensland, maybe in Adelaide, or in Perth, seeing unexpected beauty, and feeling the presence of God. How many people in the

Western culture say that they meet God at the beach? And, how many Ministers in Protestant Churches ridicule people who meet God at the beach? I've heard way too much of that. As a matter of fact, I included this story because I have a friend who wrote an entire book that ridiculed people meeting God at the beach. So, this was my answer to her.

So, for me, this was an amazing kind of moment. What I try to do with it is unpack it in a whole series of chapters about the *natural world*. I move from that scene on the beach, and I try to help people *experience*. Most people have these experiences, but they do not know what to do with those experiences; they don't know how to story them. So, they have an experience, and it is meaningful; and it is profound; and it is amazing; and it is beautiful, but they don't know how to connect it to any type of narrative that drives a more profound sense of identity or one that illustrates justice in the world. These experiences sometimes just float without frames. So, in the first part of *Grounded*, I am trying to create a *frame*, a story, a narrative about those kinds of experiences, so that people might be able to *story their reality*. I very quickly go through stories about *dirt*.



This is my dog *Rowan*. Yes, Anglicans, he is named after Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury. They have the same eyebrows! In case you are wondering, I had tea in April with Rowan Williams in Cambridge. He had *Grounded* sitting right there next to his cup. I said, "Did you like the book?" He said, "I like your dog's name!"



This is the place where I walk along the Potomac River every morning when I am home. I tell this story in the Chapter about *water*, and then I move on to talk about the *sky*.

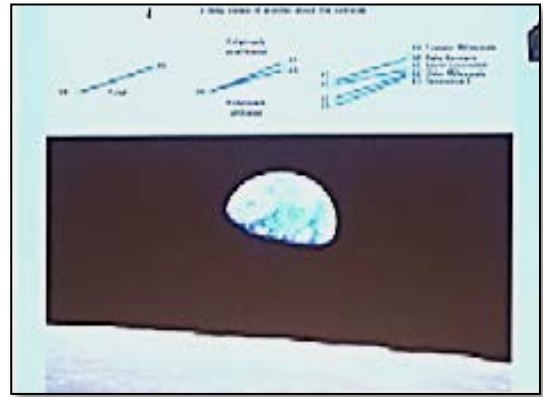


The *sky* – This is the sky in North Carolina! I took this photo in a place called Nags Head, North Carolina, a beautiful place.

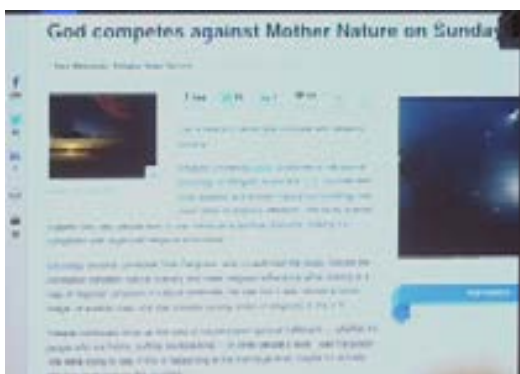
And so, each one of the chapters talks about these classic elements – *dirt, water, sky*. Then, I thread, of course, *fire*, as that fourth element, through each chapter as the *animating spirit* that helps us to *connect* and *love*, and *experience* these things with depth, to see, and to feel, and to know beauty.

Previously, I said that sometimes there is a division among people who attend Churches about *nature*. I think it is about this –





Often, we are pre-disposed to think of Church, religion, spirituality, and *nature* as competitors.



This is a story from about fourteen or so months ago from *USA Today*, where two scholars, I believe, from Baylor University, had just finished a study, and the study was absolutely fascinating, where they discovered that Counties in the United States with higher degrees of nice weather and natural beauty had lower Church attendance.

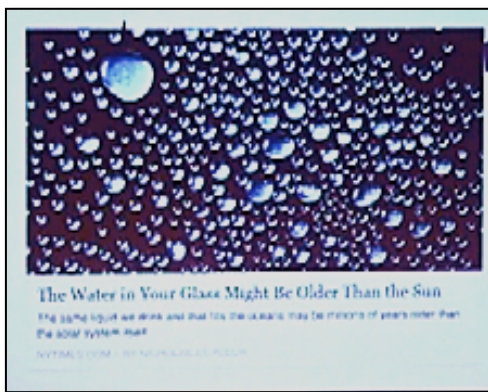
First time I ever showed this slide, I was on Victoria Island in western Canada, and the Canadians looked at me, and they said, “And, Americans get money to study things like this? We could have told you that!” But, there you have it! We see it as this headline says – *God Competes With Mother Nature on Sunday*. But, why must it be a competition? The thing that I have been trying to pursue is to help people to understand that it is not a competition.

I’m going to show you this picture pretty quickly –

This beautiful picture is one of the earth rise, from *Apollo* in 1969. And above this, there are some lines. These lines are from a chart. Last Autumn, *Pew Forum*, a survey organization in the United States surveyed folks about religious attitudes, social attitudes, and political attitudes. They let this survey out which was about spirituality and politics. It was a fascinating survey, and this is one of the questions that really caught my attention.

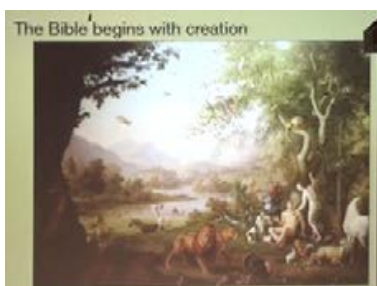
They asked people in the context of the survey – Have you in the past week experienced a sense of awe or wonder about the universe? What *PewForum* realised is that you cannot measure Church attendance, and know anything about people’s understanding of faith or God at this point in our culture without going deeper. You have to try to figure out how to measure people’s spiritual longings, and that is a pretty tough thing to do. So, this was a question under the bank of questions to try to measure people’s *spirituality*. Have you in the last week had a sense of awe and wonder in the universe? It is fascinating that they asked this question seven years ago, and you can see that from 2007 to 2014 when the survey was actually done – it was released last year – that percentage in the United States rose from 39% of the population to 46% of the population. And, in the middle graph, those are the percentage of Americans who are religiously affiliated and have experienced that sense, and the percentage of Americans of core religiously unaffiliated who have experienced that sense. And, it is almost exactly the same percentage – only two points different. And then on the far graph, it’s how it breaks out generationally. When you ask Americans between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine years, the millennials, have they had

a sense of awe and wonder about the universe in the last week, forty-nine percent of them say, "Yes." That is the highest reading for any generation. It's the millennials that have a sense of awe in nature. Baby-boomers come next. Baby-boomers and grandparents, you can talk to your children, or your grandchildren. I believe the next one is the silent generation, the older generation, sixty-five plus. And, then comes older millennials. And, then at the bottom of the pile are Generation-X Americans. And, there is a very good reason why Gen-Xs are there on the chart. They are the people right now that have the youngest children. And, they are too busy for awe and wonder. They'll get there! They'll get there! And, every day we can open the newspaper, or open our computers and find stories like this.

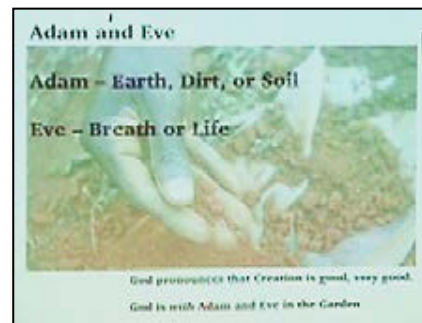


This is from the front page of the *New York Times*. When I was putting together the slide show, about three months ago, I read the story headed – *The water in your glass might be older than the sun*. It was about the formation of the molecules in the water, and about how incredibly ancient they are. So, those glasses of water right here on this stage are to *wonder about!* Water molecules older than we can imagine. Everything is holy.

I'm going to slip through a couple of slides really quickly, because I want to get to the *neighbour* part.



You will see what is happening here. It is a little reminder.



The Bible begins with the story of creation – the creation of the whole world; the creation of Adam and Eve whose names mean *soil* ( אָדָמָה – adamah ) and *life* ( חַיָּה – Chavvah ).



Creation is our natural habitat, the sacred garden of our lives.



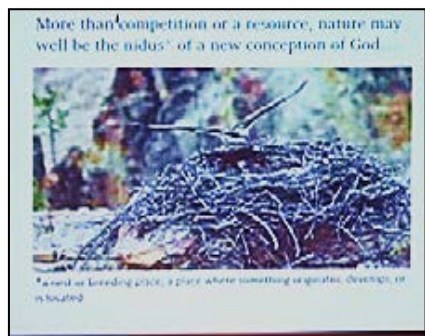
And, the book of Genesis also teaches that of the moral stage of our lives, the choices we make, and the consequences of those choices.



So, theologically, *nature* is revelatory, sacramental, and mystical to be celebrated, extolled, enjoyed. It is the arena of art, and poetry, and music, and experience, and adventure,



but it is also wounded and demanding because of the morality aspect of it – what we human beings often do to *nature*. Those are important things to think about.



As a result of all this theology that I have inherited, and the love of science that I have developed, I have come to the conclusion that this whole fascination with *nature* is awesome! Because, just at the very time the whole planet is under threat of losing all of this beauty and wonder, we are paying attention. And, if there indeed is a God, there is a *Spirit*; there is a *Heartbeat* to the earth. That heart is beating faster and louder than ever before, and apparently we are beginning to listen.

So, I have begun to think of nature as a nest, the *nidus* of a new theology. So, instead of pooh-poohing my millennial friends who go on hikes to find God on Sunday morning, and miss Holy Eucharist like my daughter, I have instead begun to think that those walkers on the hills, and those people who are praying at the beach, or the folks who are looking at the sunrise and the sunset – maybe, they are writing a *theology*. And, perhaps, it is incumbent upon us to go there, and listen.

When my daughter told me that she thought that Church was boring, that was pretty scary, because I was like the Church lady.

I asked her, “Why don’t you wish to go to Church?”

She said, “Oh, Mum, it is so boring!”

I said, “Well, do you believe in God?”

“Yes,” she said, “But, Church is boring!”

And, fairly recently, my daughter who studies at UVA had conversation with her Religious Studies Professor who is acquainted with all of my books. She asked my daughter – my poor daughter, “How is it growing up in a house where your Mum writes all this stuff?”

My daughter said, “Well, you know, it is a little like going to a restaurant, and being the daughter of a food critic.”

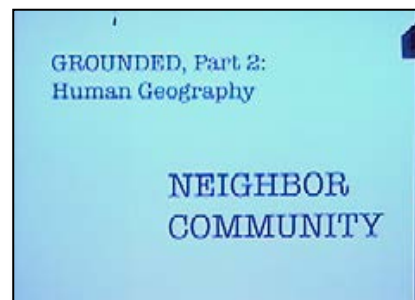
I asked my daughter, “Where do you find God?”

And, she said, “When I am hiking!”.

And, right there, I knew that was the moment.

I could have been the mother who said, “That is all right honey, but, while you live under this roof, you are going to Holy Eucharist each Sunday.”

Or I could be the Mum who learnt how to hike! And, that is what I did! I’m afraid of the outdoors, but I learnt how to hike, and my book *Grounded* is very much a gift from my daughter. And, it is out there that I learned to hear the questions differently. And, I learned about the *nidus*. And, that is very exciting!



The second half of *Grounded* is about human community, and I turned the other part of the *Möbius strip*. I think that is fairly easy for many types of people to see God and *nature* and to think about holiness, spirit and the natural world, but some of those people have a hard time seeing the sacredness of *neighbour*. And, then, people who lean towards seeing the sacredness of *neighbour*, don’t always see the sacredness of *nature*. So, I’m trying to bring these two things

together in this book. So, here we have again the structure of the universe:



And, one of the things that is fascinating about this structure of the universe, not only was it a *theological structure* and a church structure, but also, we human beings structured society and *economics* and *politics* in this way as well. So, we developed hierarchical structures where the people we deemed to be the “good” people, the “smart” people, the people who “knew how to do stuff” – those people were on the top closest to God, and then there were ranks of those people until you got to the rest of us. And, then there were those people you don’t really want to hang around with. So, our *political structure* is – Kings, Lords, the whole great chain of being down to slaves and beasts. Then, there is the *economic structure* – The United States is just doomed! We think rich people are closest to God, because really deep in the theology of America is the belief that the people who are most holy, the people who are most sanctified, and pious, would be the wealthiest people; and so we have an *economic structure* that privileges the rich, but not the poor, because the poor are dirty people, the sinners, and they deserve what they get. So, we have *political structures*, *social structures*, and *economic structures* – and, that’s what this results in – an architecture where we actually build the world to resemble the cosmology that we have. This is the building of a neighbourly world, and it is the *cosmology of the vertical universe*.



This is New York city. Where are the most powerful people? At the top – the richest people are at the top. When you look at this picture, the only thing you can see is wealth. It’s all out of proportion to the actual number of people who hold it. Then, you see this section of the picture right here – Those are the people who might be middle class or upper middle class people; those who can only afford to rent apartments; and you can’t even see the poor. There is no architecture of poverty to be seen, nothing visible in the photograph. This is a great America! And, there is one political candidate whose vision is to make this even bigger – even greater! Him, at the top with God! And, he’s not a megalomaniac or anything?



What’s fascinating about this picture is that this is New York city just a “few” years earlier. I think this is from about 1790. And, you can see that there are still tall buildings in New York city, but all of these tall buildings are *theological* buildings. They are all churches. So, when you stumbled upon the landscape of New York city three hundred years ago, you still knew who had the power, and where all the money was – and, it was around religion! And, there is one other tall building in this picture, and that is a fort. So, it was about *faith* and about *military power*. And these had the tallest buildings symbolizing wealth and power and access, and who was closest to God.

Now, this *architecture of verticality* that is a social, and a political, and an economic, as well as a theological one, manifested itself in the very high point of church building in Western countries around the 1900s.



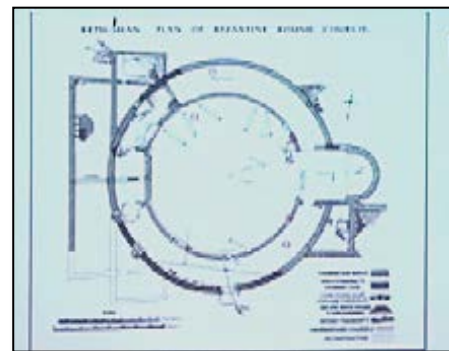
These two pictures are pictures of the tallest church buildings in the world. On the left is the picture of the Lutheran Church in Ulm Germany. It started out as a Catholic Church. The bottom half was built in the Middle Ages. It didn't get around to being finished until the 1890s when they added that huge spire making this the tallest building in the world for the eleven years following, at 530 feet. And, then, the building on the right is in Chicago. There were a group of people there who could not stand the fact that the tallest church building in the world was in Germany, so they raised money and built this church which is the First United Methodist Church in Chicago. It is also called the Chicago Temple. It is 568 feet tall. It was completed in 1924, and it is a little different to the church in Germany which is all church from the bottom to the top. But, in Chicago, which is a very mercantile place, it is only church for the first four floors, and then there comes a whole bunch of office space and apartments and other things. And, then you get up to the top, and that thing right there is called the *Chapel in the Sky*. And, when that was opened, it was actually advertised as – *Come to the Chicago Temple and worship in the Chapel closest to God!*

And then we get this:



After the two tallest church buildings we get *commercial* buildings and *political* buildings. They get to be much taller than church buildings, and I am reminded that story of Babylon.

In the back part to *Grounded* I wondered – Is there a different type of spiritual architecture that is emerging? Does it always have to be about pointed buildings? I thought about this. We had another choice since the very beginning of the Christian tradition, and it wasn't about pointed buildings. It was about circular buildings.



This is an archeological plan for a Christian place of worship in Israel. People believe it was dated from about 250 AD. You will notice that it is round, not pointed. What is also fascinating about this site is that it has no roof. This part here – those pillars were not strong enough to support a roof. There was only a roof along this – the outside circle part was covered. But, the inner part of this circle was the earth and the sky touching. This water, the baptistery – they created a little stream that came down here to the centre, and then from the centre you look out here to this funny little part here looking like the family dining room. That would be where the Eucharist would have been

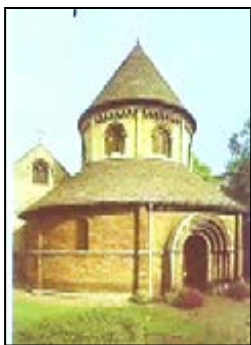
celebrated. Why didn't we do that? Why didn't that become the architecture of Western Christianity? Well, you know, oddly enough it did!



In Denmark in 1150



In Northampton England in 1100



In Cambridge in 1190



In Richmond in Vermont 1813



In Belmore in Scotland 1767

It's always been there. This alternative architecture; a different kind of space, a different arrangement, a different signalling of the relationship of *water* and *earth* and *sky*, of *neighbourliness* – not about rows, and giant phallic symbols in the sky – a different architecture; an alternative architecture. And, in the back of *Grounded* I explore this architecture in four quick chapters. I don't have time to cover them now. You'll have to read them yourself later!

But, the first part of the architecture is *an architecture about who we are through time.*

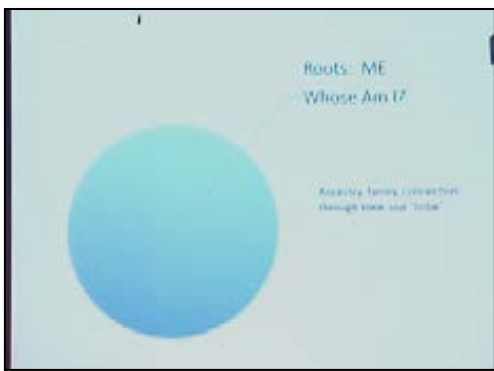


This little building is a Quaker Meeting House in Eastern Maryland that my husband and I stumbled into in 2010 – a favourite tourist attraction. It is beautiful. It is one of the oldest, continuously used church buildings in all of North America. It was built in 1684, and it is just fabulous. The last renovation was in 1720. They've only repaired the roof since then. Other than that, this building is fairly intact. It has the beautiful original wood inside. When I walked into this building as a tourist, my breath was taken away.

My husband said to me, "O, my gosh, I can't believe that you like this building so much. You're so Anglican. You love those needle buildings with the shiny glass windows, with that incense clouding the way." He continued, "What is it about this Quaker building that speaks to you?" I said, "I don't know."

Three years later, I was doing family history research for *Grounded* which started out as a book about family history that *grounds* us in the world, and I had just been sent on ancestry.com a new family tree. It had been filled in by some relative of mine that I do not know. It was my

mother's family history. And, I had never been able to figure it out, as my mother's family was very poor. So, there was my mother, her father, and his father before him, his father before him, his father before him, going back into the nineteenth century, into the eighteenth century, before the American revolutionary war, the early 1700s, and it landed on a person by the name of Andrew Orm who was the first ancestor of my mother's paternal line who came to the new world. He arrived sometime in the early 1670s to the colony of Maryland. He was born in Monarchy Scotland, baptized in a Church of Scotland parish there, in 1652. The interesting thing about him on the record was – that he was married to one Eleanor Morris at the Third Haven Meeting House in Eastern Maryland in 1678. On our tourist visit to Maryland in 2010 I had found my own ancestors, and I didn't even know it! But, I think I had felt it? Who are we?

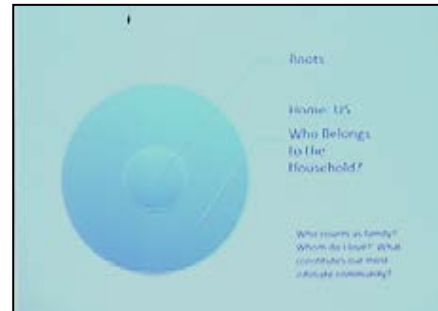


This is the **first circle** of the spiritual architectures of our hearts.

The **second circle** extends to our families, the people we make home with, our most intimate associates, those whom we love and who love us.



This is our family. Welcome to Christmas at our house. Richard and Emma. Some of you remember Richard and Emma, and Rowan, the dog. It was hard to get Rowan to sit still that Christmas morning.



And, this is – Who are we? Who belongs to the household? Who do we make home with? This is why gay marriage and stuff is so important.

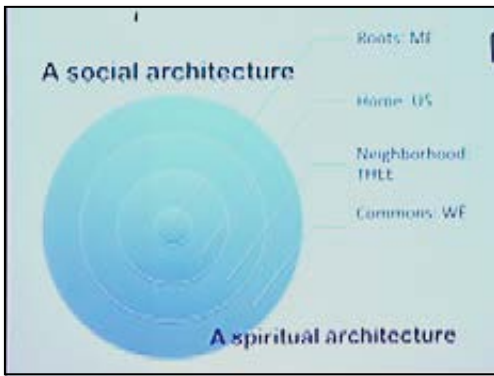
The **third circle** is that larger circle of how our families are linked to other families in the neighbourhoods that we create; those who lives with us.



These are lovely pictures of my neighbourhood. I call this the **thee** part of the architecture. We move from **me** to **us** to **thee** -, and then there is a further architecture of our lives; it is an architecture of **we** – the big **WE!** - Community beyond our neighbourhoods; when neighbourhoods fashion the Commons.



Now, what I have done there – and this is where we’re going to end – I have offered up the idea that we could have an alternative *social architecture*, that is also a *spiritual architecture*. It is not about verticality, but it is about this:



It is about moving from *me* to *us* to *thee* to *WE*. And, each one of us writes that story, creates that architecture in our own lives, and then all of those architectures all exist here:



They are all connected in a web. It stretches through time, through space, yet whatever happens in the architecture that is most intimate to me has an impact out there. Those of you who like physics, this is spooky movement at a distance. – that no particle exists in isolation from the other particles.

That is a picture, believe it or not, that describes the World Wide Web (www). And, if you don’t like technological illustrations for that sacred architecture, perhaps you’ll like this one:



Overlying a picture of the universe with a web, an organic web of nature.

So, this is the task before us, and this is what I hope that you will talk about in your small groups.

I will describe the last slide.

How do we move from here in verticality to here? How do we make this shift? How is this shift emerging around you? And, how can we participate in this picture rather than just living out of this picture?

This question right now in my country is the biggest political question all around us, because we have one political candidate who says he wants to make America great again, and that he is going to build a skyscraper so big, and he’s going to make somebody pay for it.

Then, we have a President who has for the last eight years been working on this:



And these two realities have been stretching and straining my home, and probably yours too! I do not know Australian politics well, but I bet you could tell me stories that relate to this situation, too. This is England, Canada, France, the Planet! Are we going to have this:

If we have this, guess what we are going to get – We’re going to get a Catholic elevator, an Islamic elevator, several Islamic elevators, all fighting to be “the” Islamic elevator, and we’re going to have a Hindu nationalist elevator, fighting other kinds of Hindus fighting for power in India. We’re going to have a Buddhist elevator, a Fundamentalist



elevator, and we're going to have all kinds of Protestant elevators. We're going to have elevators, elevators, elevators, elevators, all people screaming:

*Come and get into our elevator, because our elevator is the only one that goes up there, and once you're on that elevator, not only will you be able to have **Him**, but everyone in the world is going to become just like us. We're going to set up a global political system where we can reach **God.**"*

And, that's what we're going through on planet Earth right now!

We can have something else – and we better, because, if we don't, I don't know where we are going to wind up. That's what I want you to talk about in your groups.