

REVISED EDITION

The Green Bible

**WORDS OF LOVE FOR
A SUFFERING PLANET**

STEPHEN BEDE SCHARPER
& SIMON APPOLLONI





Published in Australia by
Garratt Publishing
32 Glenvale Crescent
Mulgrave, VIC 3170
www.garrattpublishing.com.au

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First published in 2020 by Novalis Publishing Inc.
This edition published by arrangement with Novalis Publishing Inc.

Original Cover Design: Martin Gould
Cover image: iStock
Internal images: iStock
Layout: Audrey Wells

ISBN 9781922484000

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Cataloguing in Publication information for this title is available from the National Library of Australia.
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Novalis acknowledges the support of the Government of Canada.

*To Hilary,
In whose wide and winsome spirit
all shades of creation
find a hearing—and a voice.*

—Stephen Bede Scharper

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SAMPLE

Preface to the Revised Edition

The world is very different today from what it was in 1993, when the first edition of *The Green Bible* was published.

While “global warming”, ozone depletion, and species extinction were then pressing concerns, the broader, cataclysmic effects of global climate change were less widely acknowledged.

No parliamentary assemblies had yet declared “climate emergencies”. A system of climate change denial was effectively casting doubt on climate change science in mainstream media, and there was a widespread sense that a well-tuned tinkering with our global economy would rectify our eco-problems. A few more solar panels here, a few more LED lightbulbs there, and an uptick in reusable products and recycling programs would serve as suitable course adjustments to a sustainable future.

And the prospect of a catastrophic pandemic like COVID-19 bordered on the unthinkable.

In short, a slight “greening” of our “business-as-usual” approach would get us on the right track.

Today, we are being forced to realise, with the inspired help of Greta Thunberg, Autumn Peltier, and an awakened climate youth movement, that business as

usual is not a viable option. The disastrous consequences to our climate – including increased hurricanes, massive flooding, and horrendous wildfires, swirling from Australia to Canada – all point to the devastating effects of our current climate moment. Moreover, tragically, as these words are being written, COVID-19 continues to ravage thousands of lives and lifeways around the world.

When my wife, Hilary Cunningham Scharper, and I first conceived of this volume, we were reflecting on the place of the human within creation: we began with the Book of Genesis to help us discern an answer.

Today, Simon Appolloni and I wonder if Genesis is a narrative not so much about place, but about relationship. Might this potent story be more about building love and just relations with all creation, rather than simply about how to take our proper place within it?

Moreover, what might this ancient story be telling us amid these times of climate “chaos” and a pandemic, both of which are fracturing thousands of lives, human and more-than-human, while bringing a globalised consumer economy to a virtual standstill?

What does Genesis tell us about “integral ecology,” the twinning of a preferential love for the poor and for the Earth, so eloquently proposed by Pope Francis in his ground-breaking 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si*? Is Genesis suggesting that we should reflect upon our relationships not only in human terms, but also in terms of biological, cosmological, ethical, and spiritual integration?

Our hope for this small volume is that it may help us, as a human community, to work with, rather than against, the energies of the earth and, indeed,

the cosmos. In the words of Thomas Berry, we are invited to “befriend” rather than besmirch our home, our household, our planet. We are invited to consider that taking time to reflect on our deep relations with the earth and each other is just as important as taking actions to heal those relations.

It is hoped that these pages, with quotes from Scripture, children, poets, scientists, and dreamers, will help us re-explore our deep interconnection with all our relations. In so doing, it might help us to lovingly embrace our home – and our selves.

Stephen Bede Scharper
Toronto, Ontario
May 6, 2020

Introduction

Creation. For those within the Judeo-Christian heritage, it is the beginning of our faith, the opening gambit of God in the covenant between divine and non-divine, the Creator and the created. In our story, God fashioned the earth, sky, waters, plants, and creatures out of the darkness, and, after viewing all that had been made, God saw that “it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Today, God’s creation is imperilled – not by its progenitor, but by its stewards: us, Plato’s “unfeathered bipeds” of the human race.

For some sixty thousand years, the human family has “subdued” the earth, at times respectfully, but often irresponsibly. With little thought of future generations, we have, in the modern era, plundered the clean air, pure water, and bountiful, unspoiled land bequeathed to us, taking them and their life-sustaining fruits for granted.

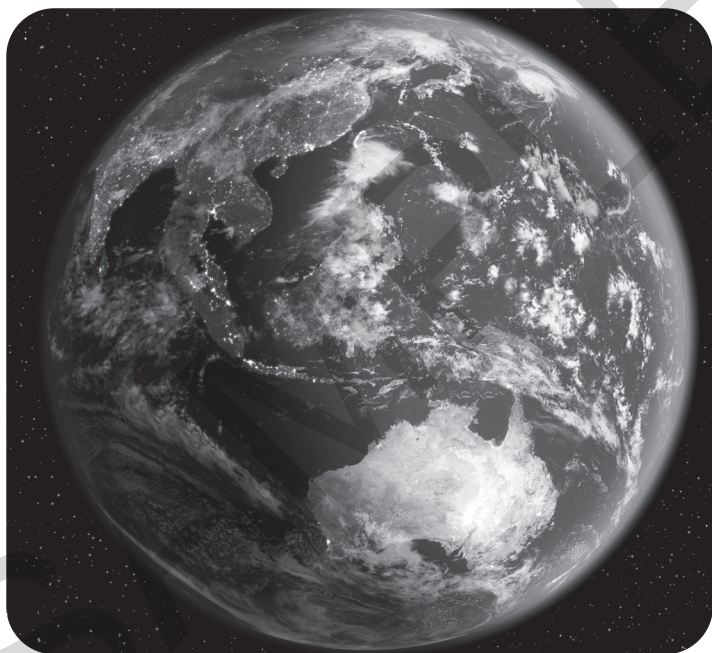
As we move more deeply into the twenty-first century, however, these natural gifts are in danger of becoming mere nostalgic memories.

The word “ecology” actually comes from the Greek *oikos*, meaning “household,” “home,” or “place to live.” The world, beautiful and threatened, is our household. And, like many twenty-first-century family households, it is deeply dysfunctional.

A household implies a working together, a synergy, which requires members to perform certain duties, fulfill certain responsibilities, and respect the other members so that the entire household coheres and flourishes. The household of our planet, however, is coming apart, as deforestation, the loss of topsoil, the rapid extinction of plant and animal species, the pollution of our air and water, and climate chaos all demonstrate.

Recently, many persons and institutions rooted in the Judeo-Christian heritage have awakened to the ecological crisis and have begun to make a connection between their faith and the fate of the earth. Plumbing the depths of their biblical and theological heritage, and learning from personal improvement in environmental efforts, they are fashioning a new faith, one informed by a reverence for life.

This reverence for life, so urgently needed to ensure our planetary household, resonates deeply in the work of God. As Philip Scharper observed in the introduction to *The Radical Bible* (Orbis Books, 1972), the Bible challenges us to search out the word of God for our flagging planet and to create a vital tradition of celebrating and cherishing life. It is hoped that this small volume – by incorporating Judeo-Christian Scriptures, contemporary facts and commentaries on our present ecological crisis, as well as the voices of poets and prophets – will assist with this quest.



In the Beginning

“Let there be light”

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Genesis 1:1-5

Genesis is a Greek word signifying “origin.” The origin of the cosmos, as the Book of Genesis suggests, was a creative process. Our universal home, like Imperial Rome, was not built in a day. It was created, rather, in a series of “days.”

These days were divine moments in which the dynamic energy of God created light out of darkness and form out of a void.

It is often said during gatherings with friends or family, where food and affirmation are freely shared, that “home is where the heart is.” If there is truth to this adage, then our primary home, the cosmos, is where we encounter the heart of God. “And it is good.”

“In the beginning” tells of choosing and affirming life, of perceiving creation and ourselves within it, of recognizing God, and of viewing the earth as our home.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1:1-5



The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness...

Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur”



I live at the heart of a single, unique Element, the Centre of the Universe and present in each part of it: personal Love and Cosmic power.... And God is also at the heart of everything.... Were creation's dust, which is vitalised by a halo of energy and glory, to be swept away, the substantial Reality wherein every perfection is incorruptibly contained and possessed would remain intact: the rays would be drawn back into their Source, and there I should still hold them all in a close embrace.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Hymn of the Universe



The human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single sacred community or we will both perish in the desert.

Thomas Berry, Befriending the Earth



Choose Life

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
“See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,