
Editors' Introduction

As we bring readers this second issue of the fourteenth volume of the *JSRNC*, many people around the world continue to struggle through the COVID-19 pandemic—a global pandemic that some have tied to ongoing human exploitation of the environment and non-human animal others (Klare 2020; Vidal 2020). For some, such as the famous primatologist Jane Goodall, the cause of the global COVID-19 pandemic is rooted in human value systems, demonstrating an enhanced need for reorienting human/nature relationships. She wrote:

My hope is that an understanding of how the world *should* be, along with the realization that it is our disrespect of the natural world that has led to the current pandemic, will encourage businesses and governments to put more resources into developing clean, renewable energy, alleviate poverty and help people find alternative ways of making a living that do not involve the exploitation of nature and animals. Let us realize we are part of, and depend upon, the natural world for food, water and clean air. Let us recognize that the health of people, animals and the environment are connected. Let us show respect for each other, for the other sentient animals, and for Mother Nature. For the sake of the wellbeing of our children and theirs, and for the health of this beautiful planet Earth, our only home. (Goodall 2020: n.p.)

Goodall's statement, of course, was rich with moral sentiment worthy of deeper analysis by scholars of religion, nature, and culture; and the COVID-19 pandemic will likely remain a touchstone event in future analyses and re-evaluations of human/nature interactions. In light of the significance of this event, the editors encourage new submissions related to the causes and impacts of COVID-19 from a variety of disciplinary and methodological perspectives. Interested readers should also be on the lookout for an upcoming special issue devoted to the COVID-19 pandemic, and hopefully such conversations can continue in the pages of the *JSRNC* and at future ISSRNC meetings.

While COVID-19 will certainly be an ongoing concern for many around the world, this issue demonstrates the wide array of research related to the religion/nature/culture nexus. The issue begins with Carles Salazar's new mathematical model for the cultural evolution of counterintuitive messages, such as religious claims. This work will be particularly useful for scholars interested in the cognitive science and evolution of religion in human populations. This is followed by Lukas Szrot's analysis of environmental themes in papal encyclicals issued by the Catholic Church from 1959 to 2015. While Pope Francis's encyclical *On Care for our Common Home* (2015) has received copious attention from scholars of religion and nature and has been lauded by some as a turning point in religious engagement with the environment, Szrot demonstrates how Francis' work both builds upon and deviates from decades' worth of thinking regarding the environment and environmental justice within the Catholic hierarchy. Szrot's research helps to contextualize Francis' thought and significance, both historically and theologically.

With the third featured article, 'A Brief Account of Animism in Biblical Studies', Mari Joerstad advocates for renewed attention to themes of animism in the Hebrew Bible grounded in the 'new animism' of Graham Harvey and others. According to Joerstad, biblical scholars have historically based their analyses of early Hebrew culture on the evolutionary schema of E.B. Tylor, which tended to denigrate traditional cultures and frame animism as the earliest and simplest stage of religious development through which cultures would eventually pass. For Joerstad, the perspective of 'new animism' breathes new life into the study of the natural themes in the Hebrew Bible, framing them not simply as survivals from a primitive religious past but as lively engagements between the Israelites and the natural world that are worthy of further consideration by modern audiences. Continuing with the theme of animism, the last featured article of this issue calls for the integration of natural sciences and the humanities through animist lenses to help promote efforts toward global sustainability. In 'The Critical Zone as a Planetary Animist Sphere', Dan Smyer Yü finds common ground among researchers of new animism and the geosciences in the concepts of Gaia and the Critical Zone. The author contends that these perspectives may be combined to produce science-informed affective connections to the earth that may be helpful in revising human/nature relations into the future.

Finally, this issue concludes with several reviews of books that will likely be of interest to *JSRNC* readers. From Hindu river goddesses to U.S. environmental justice cases, from Daoism to eco-alchemy, the texts reviewed here demonstrate the wide array of subjects and research

covered within the religion/nature/culture nexus. We thank our readers for their continued engagement, and as the world continues to wrestle with emerging challenges, we hope you will continue to make the *JSRNC* a leading venue for scholarship related to human/nature encounters.

We also wish to acknowledge that one of our Advisory Board members, Michael Soulé, has taken the journey from this world since the publication of the last issue. Some of the founding staff of this journal had the privilege of sharing a table, beers, and conversations with him in 2006. He graciously agreed to be a consultant on what was then a novel notion: a journal that turned a critical eye toward the intersections of religion, nature, and culture. Others have eulogized him better than we could here, but the ongoing publication of this journal honors the broadly interdisciplinary impacts of his work and his persona.

The Editors

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