

The ‘Unmaking’ of Violence: Ecology, Christian Discipleship and the Role of Religious Education

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1. The Question of Violence and the Natural World

Before it is possible to ‘unmake’ a situation of violence we must recognize that the relationship of violence exists, that there is in fact a victim or group of victims. (Blume, 1996). The lack of acknowledgment regarding human violence against the rest of the natural world and the taking of responsible action to change it, is perhaps a central stumbling block to the unmaking of this violence.

2. The Human Problematic Relationship with Nature.

Part of this conflict has to do with our operative understandings of who we are – our anthropologies and our worldviews - our cosmologies. Some of the dominant Christian religious and theological perspectives of the place of human beings in creation and the evolving story of the whole community of life has contributed to the development and continuation of violent practices against nature. Many scholars in light of the Emerging Universe Story have described the effects of our radical disconnect from the rest of natural world (McFague, 2008; Deilo, 2013; Johnston, 2014). The results of that disconnect are many, the most serious being ecocide and biocide (McFague, 2008).

3. A Problem of Language – What is Nature?

Researchers in Cultural studies also recognize difficulties in the discussion of the human and Earth relationship, finding problems within the discourse itself. Slack suggests that there are challenges in the use of our language in the context of these issues (Slack, 2008). What words shall we use?

4. Seeking Directions for Solutions

As religious educators these cross-disciplinary discussions offer a significant challenge in how we might approach the unmaking of violence in our research and teaching. There are a variety of currents moving toward an understanding of the deep interconnectedness of all of life and its flourish (Berry, 2000; McFague, 2008; Swimme & Tucker, 2011). Liberation theology, research and practice has also made the serious link between human poverty and the deadly pollution of the planet. (Boff, 1997) Violence and human conflicts arise more readily in situations of human deprivation and lack of sustainable resources (Blume, 1996). The growing relationship is being made regarding educating for peace and issues of ecology (Kyrou, 2007). Ecological devastation and the destruction of the natural world continue in spite of best efforts from many disciplines. War and violence continues to contribute to that destruction. What lenses can religious education bring to this challenge for the unmaking of violence? How do these questions impact the knowledge and experience of what it means to be mature Christian disciples in today’s world? How can these critical concerns be brought together into the curriculum of religious education programs?

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