From Religious Nostalgia to Eco-Postsecularism: Scriptures for Climate-Changed Futures in Fictions by Richard Jefferies, Will Self, and Octavia Butler

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Abstract

This paper offers an eco-postsecular reading of Octavia Butler's two-part *Parable* series (1993-1998) and Will Self's *Book of Dave* (2006), alongside a Victorian predecessor of contemporary climate fiction: Richard Jefferies's *After London; or, Wild England* (1885). The futuristic visions of Jefferies, Self, and Butler illustrate the exceptional explanatory and affective power of sacred texts, and reflect on the benefits and hazards of reading, re-reading, and un-reading religious scriptures under conditions of climate pressure.

Around the turn of the twenty-first century, secular intellectuals awoke from one of their most cherished dreams: a vision of progress in which religion, unable to withstand the light of reason, withers away to make room for a fully realized modernity. Joining the fate of other grand narratives, the triumphant teleology of secularization gave way to more nuanced récits: sociologists of religion registered ways in which secular and religious spaces intersect within modern societies; theologians developed atheist models of the divine; philosophers sought 'weak' articulations of religious concepts; literary scholars acknowledged the theological underpinnings of their discipline, as well as the proliferation of religious engagements in cultural texts. As applied to these diverse projects, the term *postsecular* denotes, variously, a postmodern (or post-postmodern) return of repressed religion, a corrective within the secularizing narrative of modernity, or a critical lens that transcends the limiting dichotomy of *religious* and *secular*—categories themselves revealed as the product of Christian intellectual history.

Around the turn of the twenty-first century, nations formerly known as the First World awoke from another cherished dream: the grand narrative of limitless expansion. As the fantasy of suburban prosperity for all ground against the limits of the Earth system, a new era gained its name: the Anthropocene, an epoch of human geological agency. Originating as a scientific category, the Anthropocene (and its polemical offspring: Jason Moore's Capitalocene, Donna Haraway's Chthulucene) quickly became a key cultural term in the ongoing reckoning with the human species' impact on its planetary home. Alongside the search for scientific, technological, and policy solutions, this reckoning entails a quest for new narratives capable of expressing the larger-than-human spatiotemporal scales, conceptual un-graspableness, cosmic consequences, and end-of-the-world anxieties engendered by the epochal realization of Earth's anthropogenic transformations.

To look for the postsecular within the Anthropocene is to move against the grain: the mainstream discourse of scientific warnings, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports, and political debates remain resolutely secular. And yet, the lived experience of those affected by climate crisis cannot be separated from religious

beliefs and explanatory paradigms concerning the workings of the physical universe.[1] On an institutional level, religious leaders and organizations around the world are becoming more vocal in framing climate change in theological and ethical terms, as attested to by documents like *Global Warming: A Jewish Response*; *Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action*; *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change*; and the *Laudato Si* encyclical of Pope Francis. The rise of new eco-theological concepts (eco-jihad, the eco-kosher movement, the 'integrity in nature'-principle articulated by the World Council of Churches) and new interpretations of existing ones (for example, ecological sin as used by Patriarch Bartholomew and environmentalist uses of *tikkun olam*—the Jewish ideal of repairing the world) likewise attest to the vibrancy of religious responses to environmental crisis.[2] The cost of ignoring the institutional and affective power of religion to advance (or hinder) climate adaptation and mitigation is becoming increasingly apparent.

While existing religions rediscover their ecological dimensions, new forms of religious expression continue to develop within an ostensibly secular society. Such developments include varieties of 'dark green religion,' which Tylor Bron defines as "deep ecological, biocentric, or ecocentric" (13); diverse manifestations of Gaia (sacred and holistic, or—in the latest work of in Bruno Latour—secular and *weird*); cultural movements like the Dark Mountain Project; and theoretical formulations like Bronislaw Szerszynski's interdisciplinary theory of planetary spirit. Outlining a forward-looking research agenda for the field of religion and environmental change, Sigurd Bergmann asks "whether we could talk about a *new emerging civil religion* characterized by what scholars have started to call 'ecological spirituality'" (31, emphasis in original). Global North environmentalism is coming to terms with both its largely un-

[1] For a series of empirical studies illustrating religious responses to climate change, see *How the World's Religions Are Responding to Climate Change: Social Scientific Investigations,* ed. Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay (Routledge, 2014).

[2] For a multidisciplinary discussion of the religion-climate change interface, see Sigurd Bergmann and Dieter Gerten's *Religion and Dangerous Environmental Change* (Verlag, 2010), and their *Religion in Environmental and Climate Change* (Continuum, 2012). For an introduction to the ecological dimensions of world religions, see the special 2001 issue of *Daedalus* (vol. 130, no. 4) edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim. For further discussion of religious ecology, see Grim and Tucker's *Ecology and Religion* (Island Press, 2014).

acknowledged Christian underpinnings, and its privileged position in relation to what Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier call "empty-belly" (xxi) environmentalism—whose on-the-ground struggles for environmental justice are frequently embedded within non-secular cosmological and spiritual systems. If "full-stomach" (xxi) environmentalism is to become less parochial, and more committed to rectifying imbalances in climate change culpability and vulnerability, it must attend much more carefully to local and indigenous worldviews, including those incompatible with secular constructions of reality.

The conversation between religion and the Anthropocene unfolds across multiple academic disciplines and fields of cultural production. My focus here is the novel: an anthropocentric carbon culture genre ill-equipped to tackle the meta-human perspectives and expansive spatiotemporal scales integral to religious and climate change discourse. In spite of conceptual challenges, the emergent subgenre of climate fiction (cli-fi) attempts to render anthropogenic environmental change in narrative form. When confronted with the enormity of its subject, cli-fi draws liberally on religious tradition: the despoiled Eden, the Deluge, the life-saving Ark, the tragedy of unheeded prophets, the horrors of the Apocalypse. In addition to such borrowings, some of climate fiction's futuristic scenarios explore the role of religious beliefs, practices, and texts in climate-altered worlds. Imagining ways in which sacred texts are preserved, transmitted, reconstructed, or created anew by future humans allows contemporary authors to examine the relevance of Holocene spiritual and narrative legacies to climate-altered civilizations.

Below, I discuss four literary narratives—three contemporary climate fictions and one Victorian precursor—that encourage meta-textual reflection on the role of religious scriptures in times of environmental crisis. Richard Jefferies's *After London; or, Wild England* (1885), an obscure but influential pioneer of apocalyptic urban fiction, expresses late-nineteenth-century anxieties about industrialization and urbanization through nightmarish images of London-turned-toxic-bog. As the narrative progresses, Jefferies counters his eco-gothic nightmare with a hopeful vision of a healthier future civilization grounded in reason—but still hospitable to a restored Christianity. *After London* reflects the

ambivalences of its times: its affirmation of secular reason is leavened with nostalgia for 'pure' Christian values; its positivistic model of nature is disturbed by racist anxieties about 'pagan' vitality, and by transcendentalist moments of enchantment; its disdain for modern literary production is paired with a fetishization of ancient cultural heritage. When faced with the task of imagining an adequate religious script for future England's resurrected civilization, the avowed secularist Jefferies is unable to think beyond the (Eurocentric) obvious: a purified version of 'true' Christian scripture.

After London's Victorian nostalgia is unviable for the more self-aware climate fiction of the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Revisiting Jefferies's territory—a technologically devolved, topographically unrecognizable, post-catastrophe Greater London—Will Self's *The Book of Dave* (2006) mocks the idea of basing a new civilization on outdated religious scripts. Published in the era of militant New Atheism and growing anxiety about the global rise of fundamentalisms, Self's satire denounces the misogyny, authoritarianism, and plain stupidity of its religious subjects. Finally, I turn to Octavia Butler's *Parable* series. Written in the United States—advanced capitalism's most pious nation-state—and from within the complex legacy of African-American Christianity, Butler offers a more nuanced picture of religion's destructive and liberatory powers. *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998) juxtapose two contrasting responses to socio-environmental crises: the re-entrenchment of xenophobia, stoked by the nationalistic church of Christian America, and the founding of the socially progressive, science-based religion of Earthseed by an intrepid African-American teenager, Lauren Oya Olamina. Read together—and against their Victorian predecessor—Self and Butler's volumes illuminate the heterogenous roles sacred narratives can play in climate-altered societies, prompting reflection on the relevance of scriptural traditions to current and future Anthropocenic transformations.

Ancient and True Religion: *After London*

Richard Jefferies's 1885 volume is a strange hybrid. Part One (*The Relapse into Barbarism*) offers a futuristic natural history that categorizes, in quasi-scientific detail, the fauna, flora, and human customs of southern England, largely emptied of people in the wake of an unexplained environmental catastrophe. Part Two (*Wild England*) presents a neo-medieval coming-of-age story that follows young nobleman Felix Aquila on a quest to make his fortune and win the hand of his beloved Aurora. Jefferies's protagonist is a rational man whose clear mind and "natural aptitude for the physical sciences" make him focused on worldly problems (158). His scant collection of books (damaged relics from a bygone era) includes a science primer, an abridged history of ancient Rome, and a history of England—a library that reflects the young man's terrestrial interests. Felix's secularism finds its counterpart in the faith of Aurora, an idealized figure of female purity, whose life's mission is to promote "ancient and true religion" (155).

Aurora restores church buildings and services, curates "fragments of Scriptures that had come down from the ancients" (156), and works on recording inherited religious teachings, so they may reach the widest possible audiences:

> When the manuscript was at last completed it occupied her months to transcribe copies of it for circulation; and she still continued to make copies, which were sent by messengers and by the travelling merchants to the markets, and even across the sea. (157)

Aurora's labor of reconstruction is mirrored in Felix's efforts to preserve and produce secular knowledge through collecting, transcribing, and annotating extant sources, as well as composing his own book of law for the shepherds who declare him king. Felix and Aurora's missions complement one another: just as the young man's technological and legal savvy allows him to lay the foundations for a future kingdom, Aurora's steadfast faith provides the new kingdom's spiritual foundation—play-

ing the familiar role of (feminine) handmaiden to the narrator's (masculine) civilizing mission.

Jefferies's descriptions of future England's fauna and flora are matched by his anthropological classification of native religions, which project colonial fantasies (the rapacious heathen, the noble savage, the menacing wilderness) onto a future 'barbaric' England. Society comprises a racial and religious hierarchy: 'the nobles' avow various versions of Christianity (all corrupted, with the exception of Aurora's); the ferocious 'Romany' worship the moon and engage in magical rituals; and the animal-like 'Bushmen' have no religion at all. The value of religion is inversely proportional to its proximity to the natural world. In the pagan worldview of the Romany, woods, hills, streams, and winds are alive with demonic beings—including traveler-luring "ladies of the fern" (142) and vampiric bat-women. Only Aurora's high-minded purity can calm the anxiety evoked in Felix by this Orientalist conjunction of natural and sexual forces. When restored to equilibrium, Felix assesses natural landscapes with the pragmatic eye of a future kingdom-builder in search of geomorphological features with the greatest defense or trading potential—or with the aestheticizing gaze of a post-Romantic European subject.[3]

The text's dismissal of pagan animism and its embrace of Felix's modern relationship with the environment reveals the paradox of its futurist vision: while *After London* imagines London's postindustrial landscape as a site of gothic horror so toxic it can sustain no life, it fails to ask whether (re)building civilization on the same cultural blueprints might result in a similarly abject outcome. Against the vagaries of time and climate, the value of canonical (Christian) teachings remains immutable. In the book's sentimental finale, Felix travels home toward Aurora—and the dawn of a new civilization.

[3] For a discussion of Jefferies's contradictory relationship with nature (moving between secular materialism and transcendentalist pantheism) see Roger Ebbatson, "Seeking 'the Beyond': Desacralising/Resacralising Nature in Richard Jefferies" in *Dynamics of Desacralization: Disenchanted Literary Texts* ed. Paola Partenza (V&R unipress, 2015).

You Can Be Your Own Prophet: *The Book of Dave*

In *The Book of Dave*, Will Self imagines future London as an archipelago, with the novel's central action taking place on the provincial island Ham (former Hampstead). The plot moves between the recent past (1987-2003), where it focuses on the personal and psychological struggles of cab driver Dave Rudman, and a postapocalyptic future (509-524 After Dave) in which Ing, an authoritarian theocracy, models itself on a scripture ('The Book') composed by Dave during a mental breakdown. Through his Book, Dave shapes all aspects of Ing life: his cabbie 'Knowledge' of London topography frames the physical and metaphysical parameters of the known world; his bitter divorce and custody battles are reflected in the strict separation of genders and the compulsory 'changeover' of children; his workplace argot is integrated into ritual greetings and everyday vocabulary ("foglamp" for sun (1), "Driver" (12) for priest, et cetera). Dave's modern-day scripture provides "a comprehensive blueprint" (349) for post-catastrophe society.

Parodying narratives of divine authorship, the Book comes to Dave in a series of revelations, spurred on by (drug-induced) voices: "*There is no god but you, Dave*" and "*You can be your own prophet*" (345). The text offers a collage of religious teachings gleaned by Dave from a variety of religious traditions (his best friend's Islam, his grandfather's Judaism, his aunt's Mormonism), communicated through a mélange of scriptural genres (parables, homilies, prophesies, epistles, runs). Dave shores up these fragments to envision an immutable London governed by eternal rules—a desperate bid for stability in the face of personal and global crisis.

In the postapocalyptic future, Dave's dream of stability is upheld by the orthodox men ('dads') and clergy ('Drivers') of Ing, who maintain that The Book contains "all the understanding any Hamster needed of anything" (60). Like all sacred scriptures, however, the Book spurs hermeneutical debate and doctrinal disagreement. The scripture's teaching competes with local knowledges inscribed into the topography of Ham: "Every boulder, copse and crete outcropping on Ham had its own story to divulge. The island was a tapestry of naming, worked over again

and again by the thousands of generations who have trod its leafy lanes and grassy paths" (302). The island's women possess their own knowledge, transmitted through songs and storytelling. Even motos, genetically engineered animals, recite their version of history—in addition to teaching Ham's children about foraging, seasonal rhythms, and sex (and thus fostering an intimate, environment-embedded connection between the human and the non-human). Already threatened by proliferating orality, the Book's monopoly on knowledge is further weakened when prophet-cum-heretic Symun discovers a second holy book: Dave's "new testament" (195) that revokes the teachings of the original scripture.

In the contemporary plot, Dave pens this final epistle after achieving a measure of psychological healing. The text calls for universal love and respect, and, crucially, includes an acknowledgement of impending climate catastrophe. Reframing the concerns of his original Book, Dave moves from an obsession with familial arrangements to a species-level awareness:

> Between the narrow feint the new Book whispered: the ice caps may melt, the jungles shrivel, the prairies frazzle, the family of humankind may have, at best, three or four generations before the BREAKUP, before they find themselves sundered from the MUMMY EARTH and compelled to lie down on a crunchy sofabed of a billion animal skeletons, yet there can be no EXCUSE for not trying to DO YOUR BEST and live right. (420-21)

Dave's new testament transfers the language of domestic relations ("mummy," "breakup," "family") onto planetary matters, reversing the anthropo- and andro-centrism of the original scripture that produced widespread physical and sexual abuse of women, the psychological self-mutilation of boys, and the demotion of motos to the role of consumable resources.[4] While the old dispensation enabled technological domination, placing Inglanders above nations "mired in barbarism" (307), the

[4] For a discussion of the toxic conjunction of speciesist and sexist exploitations, see the respective works of ecofeminist scholars Donna Haraway and Val Plumwood.

new encourages an ethics of planetary care. At the end of the novel, Inglanders face a momentous choice—and it remains unclear whether they will avoid or repeat the errors of Dave's consumerist, fossil-fueled civilization, whose bequest to future generations is a hazardous scripture buried in a reef of molded plastic.

God Is Change: *Earthseed*

The two volumes of Octavia Butler's *Parable* series offer a near-future vision of adaptation under the pressures of resource scarcity, infrastructural neglect, and societal breakdown—conditions precipitated and amplified by climate change.[5] Set in the 2020s to 2090s, *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998) explore both the destructive and constructive potential of religion in times of environmental crisis. On the one hand, the conservative church of Christian America works with president Andrew Steele Jarret to promote a xenophobic, patriarchal, and nationalistic ideology summed up in Jarret's (disturbingly prophetic) slogan: "make America great again" (24). Those who refuse to fit Christian America's mold are dealt with by the armed group known as Jarret's Crusaders, whose cross-adorned tunics invoke Nazi and KKK symbology, and whose methods include reeducation camps, slavery, rape, and the forced removal of children from their families. In contrast to the dogmatism of America's official creed, the new religion of Earthseed created by Lauren Oya Olamina—daughter of a black Baptist minister and half-sister of Christian America's most celebrated preacher—rejects metaphysics and dogma in favor of survival and community-making.

"God is Change," Earthseed's central theological tenant, replaces ancient tradition with Darwinian biology and modern physics. For the empirically minded Lauren, "Change is the one unavoidable, irresistible, ongoing reality of the universe," and thus "just another word for God" (*Talents* 73). Although her naturalistic creed affords none of the emotional comforts of traditional Christianity, Lauren is well aware

[5] In an interview with Charles Rowell, Octavia Butler described "global warming" as "almost a character in *Parable of the Sower*" (61).

that "there are times when people need religion more than they need anything else" (*Talents* 60). Accordingly, the early Earthseed community offers its adherents—most of them poor, vulnerable, and traumatized—the benefits of physical safety; sustainable material survival (grounded in Lauren's study of Native American practices); rituals for burying the dead, welcoming the newborn, and binding couples; weekly gatherings; an ethical system based on the principles of care, agency, and diversity; a long-term vision of species-level evolution/immortality through extra-terrestrial settlement; and a sacred text, *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*.

Earthseed's holy books emerge gradually, in a manner resembling less divine revelation than scientific discovery. Lauren understands her work as truth-seeking: "The truths of Earthseed existed somewhere before I found them and put them together. They were in the patterns of history, in science, philosophy, religion, or literature" (*Talents* 127). This painstaking task of 'putting together' is anything but straightforward: Lauren struggles to find the right words and acknowledges her lack of literary talent. Such foregrounding of authorial frustration subverts traditional notions of scriptural perfection, and offers a new, evolutionary understanding of sacred textuality.

In both novels, verses from *Earthseed: The Books of the Living* appear diegetically as passages spoken or written by the characters, but also extra-diegetically as formal epigraphs to individual sections and chapters, blurring the boundary between scriptural and fictional discourse. Further weakening traditional distinctions between sacred and profane textuality, Lauren's *Books of the Living*, as well as the novels that contain them, are positioned in implicit dialogue with parables from the gospels of Luke and Matthew (cited in full at the end of each novel), and with the Tibetan and Egyptian Books of the Dead that Lauren finds in her father's library. Enhancing this metafictional play, the narrative structure of *The Parable of Talents* echoes the open-ended pluralism embraced by Lauren's scripture with its own vibrant heteroglossia. The narrative is a collage of *Earthseed* verses, Lauren's diaries and sketches, her husband's memoir (*Memories of Other Worlds*), her half-brother's *Warrior*, and the first-person narrative of her daughter, a writer of virtual-reality 'scenarios,' who works her way through her parents' complicated archive.

Through this elaborate inter- and meta-textual layering, Butler signals both the ongoing vitality, and the inevitable mutability of canonical tradition: if scriptural teachings are to survive, they must evolve to meet the changing needs of their audiences.[6]

Earthseed's Christian roots have been examined by a number of literary scholars,[7] but Lauren Olamina's religion is much more than "just warmed over Christianity," as Butler insisted in an interview with Stephen Potts (331). Lauren's revolutionary scripture—unlike the reverent reproductions of Jefferies's Aurora, or the self-serving eclecticism of Self's Dave—transforms and transcends canonical teachings to advance the cause of human survival, even human thriving, in a climate-altered world. Afflicted with the psychosomatic 'hyperempathy syndrome,' which causes her to vicariously experience the pain and pleasure of others (a serious liability in a world where murder, torture, and rape are common occurrences), Lauren is hyper-aware of the interconnectivity of all beings. She is an ideal prophet for the Anthropocene. Lauren rejects intra-species hierarchies (of gender, race, sexuality, ability, age, et cetera), and denies humans special status in the order of beings: "We are all Godseed, but no more or less so than any / other aspect of the universe, Godseed is all there / is—all that Changes" (*Sower* 87). Her rejection of metaphysically grounded species exceptionalism aligns with her post-humanist openness toward the possibility of humanity's technological extension (what Kimberly Ruffin calls the "Afrofuturist vision" (89) of Earthseed), as well as her profound distrust of the science/reli-

[6] Butler's revisions of biblical parables belong to the long African-American tradition of abrogating and manipulating Christian discourse—what Tuire Valkeakari calls "signifyin(g) on the sacred" (4)—as well as to the more recent genealogy of postmodernist scriptural rewriting that I discuss in *The Gospel According to the Novelist* under the rubric "scriptural metafiction" (4).

[7] Donna Spalding Andréolle, whose essay traces elements of Puritan mythology in the teleology of Earthseed, sees Lauren as "a new Christ" whose vision is rooted in her "personal interpretation of Judeo-Christian values" (120). Philip Jos places Earthseed in the context of alternative models of Christianity found in the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Marcus Borg, Elaine Pagels, and Parker Palmer, as well as the gnostic gospels. David Morris reads Earthseed through Alain Badiou's concept of the "truth event" as applied to the figure of Paul, and places it in the broader context of (African) American Christian traditions: "Earthseed grows most obviously out of dialogue with black American Christianity and American Christian fundamentalism. As a result, Earthseed's basic relationship between truth and subjectivity mimics that of Pauline Christianity" (274).

gion binary.[8] A radically future-oriented, fiercely materialistic system, Earthseed offers the possibility of an Anthropocene religion without religion, conceived not as a reified theoretical construct, but as an embodied, communal, lived experience.

The success of Lauren's vision remains under debate. Her pluralistic system might degenerate into the same kind of codified, authoritarian religion she had worked to reject. Her extraterrestrial brave new worlds might repeat old terrestrial errors, a possibility chillingly suggested by the name of Earthseed's first space-bound vessel: *Christopher Columbus*. Octavia Butler's archive contains multiple aborted beginnings of the next volume, *The Parable of the Trickster*, but the author never completed her *Parable* series—a failure one might be tempted to read as emblematic of Anthropocene's imaginative aporia.

Toward Eco-Postsecularism

When read together, the fictions examined above tell a story. Richard Jefferies's romance, penned at the high-water mark of Protestant rationalism, offers an uneasy marriage of modern scientific reason and 'ancient' Christian religion, figured in the anticipated union of the protagonist and his beloved. Although the text is highly critical of the damage done by England's industrialized civilization, it makes no attempt to question the possible role played by European Christianity (with its injunction to conquer nature, and its stark separation and hierarchization of 'spirit' and 'matter') in bringing about this toxic outcome. Although Jefferies's anthropologically-minded narrator offers a detailed account of an alternative (animist) religious system, the possibility of learning from this pagan tradition (rather than dismissing it as a titillating Ori-

[8] Peter Stillman calls Earthseed a "post-secular religion" (27) not only because of its firmly secular worldview, but also because it "has surpassed the Enlightenment's bifurcation of reason and faith" (28). Tuire Valkeakari places Butler in a lineage of African American authors who "draw on the linguistic and thematic repository of the sacred and the ancient to portray the secular and the (post)modern" (2). Kimberly Ruffin calls Lauren's/Butler's project "an Afrofuturist black feminist biblical hermeneutics that strives to resolve conflict between scientific knowledge and religiosity" (91). David Morris expounds on Earthseed's evolution-as-salvation: "This hope for social change and biological change together marks the excess that pushes Earthseed out of the realm of secular movements and into the religious" (278).

entalist curiosity) is never taken seriously. Jefferies's relationship with Europe's cultural and religious heritage is purely nostalgic: the narrative repeatedly emphasizes the antiquity of Aurora's faith as a guarantor of its value, rejecting the notion that religion, like the resurgent post-catastrophe fauna and flora described by the narrator, should be subject to evolution and adaptation.

Will Self's *The Book of Dave* counters cultural nostalgia with ridicule. In his dystopian future, the uncritical worship of a decontextualized scripture inherited from another era produces an oppressive and violent society. A late-twentieth-century cab driver's worldview is supremely ill-suited for Ham's culture—as is Dave's selective compilation of Holocene scriptures. Self's novel offers a biting satire on religious fundamentalism in general, but also, more specifically, on the collective failure to question the textual inheritance of a past whose narratives have long lost their explanatory authority. Far from being the product of divine revelation, Dave's Book is a multiple mediated product of a specific cultural moment—an unreliable text constructed out of other texts (each, in turn, the result of a long process of composition, compilation, and transmission). In accepting this dubious artifact as their culture's hallowed blueprint, Self's future Londoners foreclose the possibility of producing their own sacred narratives, better suited to their particular social and environmental circumstances.

Offering a productive synthesis of Jefferies's conservatism and Self's negation, Octavia Butler's *Earthseed* neither endorses nor rejects (Christian) scriptural tradition. Rather, she subjects it to an evolutionary revision. Lauren's scripture offers a radical break from traditional patterns of religious thought, emphasizing the lethal danger of nostalgia in a rapidly transforming environment. While her elders pine for the return of the good old days of their youth, Lauren understands that you cannot step twice into the same river. In this sense, only Lauren's scripture offers a viable, forward-looking mythology for a climate-altered world—complete with a techno-futuristic *telos* of species-level eternity beyond Earth.

While Jefferies allows science and religion to carve out adjacent but separate spheres of influence, and Self describes a fundamentalist reli-

gious society inimical to scientific thinking, Butler's radical re-scripting acknowledges religious needs while affirming a scientific worldview. Contemporary writing on eco-spirituality abounds in calls for such a synthesis: Bron Taylor concludes his book on dark green religion by confessing his long search for "a sensible religion, one that is rationally defensible as well as socially powerful" (222). Wolfgang Lucht calls for new cosmologies grounded in old archetypes that are scientifically informed, socially intelligent, and culturally compatible—all apt descriptors for *Earthseed*'s bold experiment. Butler's flexible, pragmatic, eco-postsecular adaptation locates the divine not outside the material realm but within it, affirming the biological identity of the human animal.

The futuristic climate fictions of Jefferies, Self, and Butler illustrate the extraordinary explanatory and affective power of sacred scriptures in times of environmental transformation. Their speculative scenarios explore the relevance of scriptural texts to climate-altered societies, inviting reflection on the benefits and hazards of reading, re-reading, and un-reading religious traditions under conditions of climate pressure. Now that Homo sapiens has crossed the threshold of 440ppm, cli-fi invites readers to question their cultures' sacred stories. Which narratives have outlived their usefulness? Which deserve a closer hearing? Which remain yet to be invented? And—how might this urgent process of revision and reinvention be aided by meaningful exchanges between the fields of human activity known as science and religion?

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