

The Future Is Calling Us to Greatness

with Michael Dowd + 56 Experts



Earth Honoring Faith

with Larry Rasmussen

Big ideas from this session:

- One of the world's foremost Christian environmental ethicists speaks about 'green religion' and 'eco-theology'
- Why climate and our relationship to the future is the single greatest moral issue in human history
- Mapping out the contours of where science, inspiration, and sustainability intersect

Michael: Larry, thank you so much for joining in this conversation series, The Future is Calling Us to Greatness. I'd love to invite you to just, at the first here – because some people may not be familiar with your work.

You've been an intellectual mentor of mine for a couple of decades, but many people in the series are just across the spectrum philosophically and theologically, so could you just introduce yourself and let us know, let our listeners and viewers know who is Larry Rasmussen – how you got to where you are today? Don't be bashful. Please, let us know your accomplishments and what you're best known for.

Larry: Yeah, thank you very much, Michael. I'm presently retired and living in Santa Fe, New Mexico; but I'm retired from the [inaudible 1:08] Chair of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

Among the things that I did in New York was spend a lot of time on urban, ecological issues and a lot of time as a co-chair on the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Unit of the World Council of Churches. As an academic in social ethics, I started working on environmental ethics in the 1970's and have been doing so since. I have written quite extensively and one earlier book, 1996, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*.

I won the [Inaudible 1:59] award for a book contributing to important ideas for society and, more recently, I've written a book entitled *Earth-honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* and received the Nautilus Book Awards 2014, the gold prize for the best book in ecology and

environment and the Nautilus grand prize for best book overall, so I'm very pleased about this reception of these writings.

I've done other things too, but [inaudible 2:48] had been the heart of it and writing on the side. I'm particularly pleased that the Nautilus Award for best book in ecology and environment was given for a book in religious ethics. The judges are from environmental studies, but this time, they picked a book in religious ethics, religious ethics in a new key. The new key is putting the primal elements of earth, air, fire and water at the center of the moral universe.

I think that the basic unit of human survival is not human society. It's planetary creation comprehensively. That reordering and reframing and re-centering of the moral and religious universe, putting the ecosphere at the center rather than abstracted and disembodied humans at the center was evidently what the judges in environmental studies picked up on. I'm pleased about that. That's a short version of our career here. We're also very active, [Eila 4:09] my wife and I, in Santa Fe on a number of community projects here.

Michael: That's great. Well, I'm really glad that you mentioned that both those books were award winners because I have been listening to – I was grateful that our latest book, *Earth-honoring Faith*, was available in audiobook. I've been listening to that. I must say that the guy who records it, his voice, just really does you a lot of justice. He's great. Sometimes audiobooks can actually be lessened by their reader, but you've got a great reader and he really does your writing a service.

I'm wondering. Larry, could you go a little bit – share with us some of – because I've found and I do find – I've been a student of Thomas Berry's for decades, so bringing a deep ecological, evolutionary world view to religious ethics and our relationship to the planet is something that's been central for me and why I found your work so valuable. Could you share a little bit about your thesis in *Earth-honoring Faith*?

Larry: Yes and thanks for the mention of Thomas Berry. He's been a very important influence for me and I had the privilege one time of team teaching with him in New York City. He was too modest to come to class every day. It was a class on his own work and he wasn't – he was too modest for that, so I convinced him to come a couple of days of the week. It was a short course.

Michael: That's great.

Larry: I was very happy for his presence because he's been so important to me. In this most recent book, *Earth-honoring Faith*, there are premises that I take from Thomas that are key to ethics in a new key. One of them is that his sense, his planetary health, is primary. Human

well-being is derivative. Now, human well-being has always been derivative – planetary well-being and planetary health because we're earthlings.

We're groundlings. We're creatures of the Earth, but we've had enough margin of error, I guess you might say, that we could be reckless with the abundance of nature and so it didn't register with us that our well-being is always derivative of the planet's well-being until we place the planet in jeopardy at our own hands. Now, it registers with us, for the most part, although you wouldn't know it by much of the ways in which the economy functions and continues to be an extractive economy and destructive of the planet's economy.

That leads me to a second of various convictions vital, I think, for the future of all life and that is that the first law of economics is a [inaudible 7:50] of Earth's economy, but we've been such dualists about the human economy and Earth's economy that we haven't, again, realized that, apart from the preservation of nature's economy, we have no viable, human economy. Just those two, simple, straightforward truths rearrange our moral, spiritual and material universe.

Michael: Yeah. Well, that's great, Larry, and one of the things that I appreciated about both your recent book, but your previous writings as well, is that you are one of the most significant Christian ethicists, writing from a truly biocentric, life-centered, life-honoring perspective rather than anthropocentric or human-centered.

That quotes that you just – or the main points that Thomas Berry, of course, was fond of making, you've been making those powerfully within a Christian context. You and I both know that many times the clergy are ahead of their congregation, their parishioners.

If you were giving some advice or offering council to a parish priest or a minister who was trying to bring an earth-honoring ethic into his or her congregation and doing so from the pulpit – one of the things that I've been doing is encouraging all ministers, priests and rabbis to subscribe to *Science News* and get the scientists of the congregation to help them interpret what God, what reality is revealing through evidence and inspire their congregation, not only from the bible, but also from evidential revelation.

If you were offering some coaching to some minister or priest who has come to you and said, "Larry, I really want to bring more of a earth-honoring ethic into my congregation," what sort of advice would you give? What practical suggestions might you offer for the person who's actually dealing with everyday Americans or, beyond America, maybe in other contexts too, but dealing with their parishioners trying to bring in a evolutionary, ecological sensibility and earth-honoring ethic from the pulpit?

Larry: Yeah, well, I think first, the most important thing would be to understand that the congregation probably already has the assets that its ladders are looking for. I understand that

our way of life is still deeply embedded in the contradictions of what is a fossil fueled economy and that we're all trapped in a way of life that still works with that, what I call, fossil fuel fundamentalisms or economic fundamentalisms.

Despite that fact that we're captured there, nonetheless, the assets that are present in most every community are the assets with which one can go get to another place. In that respect, I think, what's most important is to understand that it's the whole life of the whole congregation as a community within a network of communities that should be viewed systemically.

The approach of an organization called GreenFaith is one that our congregation there in Santa Fe has been a part of in a two-year certification program. The genius of that two-year certification program is that the congregation begins with a comprehensive audit. Now, it is an audit of buildings and grounds, thus what's the energy use? What's the water use of the congregation?

What are the conditions of the buildings and grounds, etc, etc, but it's far more than that. Worship is audited and the outreach ministries of the congregation are audited and the children's and youth and adult education is audited. Everything about the congregation is audited with a view to what is it doing? What's going on? Then there are a set of requirements by which those audits then are measured as to whether they are, in this particular program, a case of greening the congregation's faith.

My point here is that the so called environmental issues is not one more set of issues that asked for a committee to then compete with the other dimensions of the congregation's ministry. You don't have somebody concerned about social justice while somebody else is concerned about environmental issues and someone else is working on education for the kids in the congregation. That's not how it goes.

The wrong approach is to start by trying to form some kind of committee to address environmental issues, rather this is a systemic approach in which you use standing arrangements, standing committees, let's say of the congregation to be the media by which a comprehensive greening of the congregation, to use the lingo of the day, takes place. In that respect, you've probably got the talent, the assets and, very often, the passion of varying members of the congregation to do what they can do best.

In our congregation, for example, we had a faith an environment weekend. We do that annually. This past faith and environment weekend a group of artists – this is Santa Fe, a large number of artists in the city and in most every congregation really – a number of artists in Santa Fe, we have a congregation which is the United Church of Christ and they called themselves United Artists.

The United Artists did an exhibit for the faith environment weekend and it was terrific. Then they met with the leaders, who we happened to have come in for that particular weekend, [inaudible 15:46] and [Jeffery Rowthorn 15:48] and his wife, Anne Rowthorn, who is an environmental activist. They met with the United Artists and talked about the role of their art in worship that is earth-honoring and earth-healing.

That's just one small example. You could give a lot of other examples. We've got people in the congregation whose business includes working with pueblo and Indian communities on solar power for their communities. Well, we're talking then about solarising the facilities of the congregation, so somebody in business doing that. Somebody else, who is a roofer, talks about what kind of savings you can have with what kind of insulation with the roof when the roof needs to be redone.

All I'm saying is that the assets are there. If the approach is systemic then the clergy provides some of the leadership, but they do not take responsibility for – need not take responsibility for all of the leadership. We've put together a monitoring team, which does not do all the work itself. It gives aid to the standing committees for their work, so where's the curricula that's most helpful for the person who is working with the teenagers on their journey to adulthood, the name of the program, for catechism?

Michael: That's great. Now, is this GreenFaith program, I'm so glad that you went into some depth around that. Is this connected only with the United Church of Christ? Do Presbyterians and Episcopalians have something similar?

Larry: It's interfaith.

Michael: Oh, that's great.

Larry: It's interfaith and it's headquartered in New Jersey, but if you just go to www.greefaith.org, you'll get the homepage and you'll find a lot of programs there. The one I mentioned is for houses of worship, whether those temples, mosques, synagogues, whatever. That's the two-year certification program. There's another program specifically designed for leaders, whether clergy or lay or both in these religious communities.

That's an 18-month program. It's a combination of retreats, on an interfaith basis, periodically and then the rest done online with the congregations of which the leaders are a part. You've got both the leadership development program and a houses of worship, GreenFaith certification program. Beyond that, there are, what recalled, Green Shield programs. If a congregation says, "Well, we're not really ready yet, probably, to take on a comprehensive, systemic approach across all of the work that we're involved in or might be involved in, we really want to focus on something vital to us, namely the water issues where we are here in the

American Southwest.” Well, there’s a GreenFaith water program or GreenFaith shield program on energy.

You can focus on something that you feel is your compelling issue at the moment as well as do the leadership and certification programs.

Michael: That’s great. Is there a similar component if somebody or, say, a congregation or group within the congregation want to focus on climate change and at can they do to further?

Larry: Yeah. I’m not positive. I’d have to go look to see whether there’s one specifically for climate change. I am certain that there are a lot of resources with GreenFaith Florida addressing that because they do a wonderful job of archiving resources that are available to people. I also add here that GreenFaith will pick up on a particular issue and then seek to rally houses of worship and other community – like seminaries for example – to that program.

Presently, it’s a dynamic [inaudible 20:58] reinvestment program – divestment from fossil fuels and reinvestment in renewables and is one of the campaigns that they’re carrying out, again, on an interfaith basis and on an international basis.

Michael: That’s fabulous. I’m going to reach out. Is there anybody in particular that you would recommend that I reach out to at the GreenFaith organization?

Larry: Well, GreenFaith was founded by an Episcopal priest, Fletcher Harper and a rabbi, Rabbi Troster. Fletcher Harper is the executive director, so I would say go directly to Fletcher Harper. Stacey Kennealy is in charge of the certification program. Those two are key.

Michael: That’s great. That’s fabulous. You brought up seminaries. I’m curious if you’d like to share. What do you see happening within seminaries, within the training of ministers that you applaud and find value in? Is there anything else that you would like to see as part of the training of ministers that you think would be particularly helpful or useful or move us in the right direction?

Larry: There is a green seminaries initiative under way and I don’t know the number presently that have signed onto the green seminaries initiative that requires that the seminary, as a seminary, do so and that one can just find online too. The green seminaries initiative is also now linking up with GreenFaith so as to get a concept of requirements to be addressed if one is going to truly be a green seminary, but that’s taking hold.

That is under way and I certainly applaud it. I’ve been out of the loop for awhile since I’ve been retired 10 years already, but I know that that green seminary initiative is under way. That said, theological education by and large has been a latecomer to these critical issues.

There was a time earlier when there was a requirement of the association of seminaries to include a component in all curricula that focused on, what was called, the environmental issues.

The accrediting agency for the seminaries required that, but I don't think it was much adhered to. That's changing rather quickly now. There's a paradox here. On the one hand, theological studies and religious studies in religious communities generally are the most conservative communities there are. Because these convictions of whom we are in the scheme of things and what life is all about and what our stories of origin and identity and destiny are, changes there come slowly.

They go so deep. They've got cosmic standing, if you will, and thus, the changes are changes with much at stake. Religion is among the most conservative of all human realities. The paradox is that when those changes take place religion becomes revolutionary on a large scale. If you want changes that summon sacrifice, if you want changes that require commitment, changes for the long haul, your best place to go is to religious convictions and religious faith and religious commitments.

They will summon that kind of response. While theological education and seminary education has been slow for a variety of reasons, the green seminary initiatives, while it's been slow in coming, now it's picking up speed and it's because of this understanding of the crucial role of religion and religious communities in making the deep kinds of changes that we need to make.

Let me give you an example that's coming up. We're talking now on the second of July, but on September 23rd and 24th of this year, the United Nations will call the nations of the world together for a climate summit. I mention that because the prior weekend, September 19 to 21, Union Theological Seminary, the Parliament of World Religions, the World Council of Churches, and the New York Interfaith Center will host a religion for the Earth.

That will be a couple hundred global leaders, of religious communities, gathering on an interfaith basis to address both their communities and the United Nations climate summit. One of the events will be a huge march, the People's Climate Summit march in Washington and New York City and Religions for the Earth Conference will be one of the important features for that People's Climate Summit.

There will also be, at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, an interfaith service on the eve of the climate summit and the United Nations personnel have already welcomed a statement by world leaders and a message from them as a part of the summit itself. I'm mentioning this because I think it's indicative of the realization and scientists have been telling us for some time – I remember 1992 and the appeal of scientists to the religious community issued from the cathedral of Saint John the Divine.

Scientists have been appealing to the religious community for some time to get on board. This event in September is a sign that that partnership is taking place.

Michael: That's fabulous. It's wonderful for me to hear this because back in the – I don't even think I shared this with you when we were together in Santa Fe – back in the mid-nineties I worked with Paul Gorman and Amy Fox and Phil Clapp at the National Environmental Trust. Working with religious communities and working with religious leaders on key environmental issues that were coming up for vote in Congress and trying to organize the religious leadership of the United States: Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals, Jewish Rabbis.

It's great to see these next steps. One of the groups that Connie and I have been working closely with as we've been cheerleading and supporting and speaking in churches and colleges along the route of the great march for climate action is the interfaith power light folks who are also trying to organize religious communities on climate change specifically. It's great to hear this. In fact, I just got a phone call the other day from one of the marchers on the great march for climate action.

She was asking me – she was actually also [la la 30:10]. She was actually also involved in the 1986 peace march across the United States. There's about, I think, there's only about 45 or 50 fulltime marchers and I think 20 of them are wanting to go – they're going to be shuttled to New York City to participate in this incredible march and event happening around the fall equinox. It's exciting to hear your take on this as well.

Larry, could you – well, there's a question that Connie has wanted me to ask all of the participants in this course because the title of this is The Future is Calling Us to Greatness, this sense that we are being called to consciously be a blessing to future generations in a way that honors our ancestors and the countless ancestors who struggled and toiled and, in many cases, suffered. If they hadn't, we wouldn't even be alive.

Is there anything that you'd like to share before I ask this question that Connie's asked, which is off the wall, is there anything that you'd like to share around this theme of The Future is Calling Us to Greatness?

Larry: Thank you. I remember from our conversation, here in Santa Fe, that you led a meditation, which started with who's rooting for you? Who are the ancestors that are rooting for you and then the second part of that invitation and meditation was, "What is your call to greatness and the future that's calling you to greatness?"

I appreciated both parts of that because I think we're accountable to both the ancestors who passed their worlds on to us and we have a responsibility to consider that a sacred trust from them and the sacred trust for future generations – future generations both of homosapiens and for future generations of, what Thomas Berry calls, all the children.

Michael: Amen.

Larry: The children across the community of life. Human beings are, I think, amazingly resilient. The greatness to which we're called, at this point of civilizational crisis – it's called environmental crisis. It's an environmental crisis. It's really a civilizational crisis [inaudible 33:20] by an environmental crisis. How do we get from industrial, technological civilization to ecological, technological civilization.

That's the call and that's the vocation. That's the collective species vocation that's calling us. I think the wisdom literature of the religious traditions, which is the pan-religious and even pan-human set of traditions doesn't say a whole lot more than we are capable of answering the call to greatness. Whether we come through or not, the original literature doesn't say. It doesn't guarantee that we will.

Pete Seeger and Bruce Springsteen – one of Pete Seeger's last songs is, "God's gotten on me. God's gotten on you. Hoping we'll all get through. Hoping we'll all get through." The wisdom literature, as well as the other traditions say that we are capable, but it's a capability that has to be exercised amidst unprecedented certainty and insecurity as what we thought we could count on – [regularcy 35:01] in times of planting and harvest or seasons of seed time and harvest or ocean levels that you could count on or the composition of the atmosphere to remain steady.

None of that is certain anymore. It's a call to creativity amidst uncertainty and insecurity on a level that we haven't experienced for a very long time. We're entering a new geological epoch, I think, from the late Holocene into the early Anthropocene. We've never been here before. Human beings have been hosted by the same geological epoch. Every single one of the human civilizations has and its mark was relative climate stability rather than relative climate volatility and instability.

The call greatness is this call to be creative, imaginative in our creativity, and, to refer back to Thomas Berry again, to actually reinvent ourselves at the species level.

Michael: Yes, yes. Well, I'm so glad that you brought all that up because it's so parallel to what I've been preaching and teaching now for some time. I recently did a TEDx talk called Reality Reconciles Science and Religion and just this week I'm uploading to YouTube a five-part video discussion series designed for churches called God in Big History. It's an evidential approach to God and religion and our responsibility for future generations.

I remember one of Thomas Berry's quotes that always stuck with me. He said, "We will never enter a just, healthy and sustainably life-giving future on the resources of the existing religious traditions and we can't get there without them." In other words, they're not

going to go do it in and of themselves, yet we can't get there without that. That's why I so value your work because you're one of the point people with regards to helping to evolve the tradition, helping to bring Christianity fully and with two solid feet into an ecological, evolutionary world view and do so in a way that remains faithful to the tradition, but also helps the tradition evolve in ways that the apostle Paul, for example, couldn't have possibly known.

Larry: Yeah, well they're living traditions and we're at that point where there's needed reformation in all of those traditions. As they are now, they're not tuned to the kind of changes that are required of them, but they are living traditions and just a reminder that the home turf of all religions is death and renewal. It's birth and rebirth. It's conversion, repentance and new beginnings.

This is also reflecting that fact that the great religions were religions that began in crisis and in trauma and responded to them in ways that were life-giving. This is not alien territory. This is familiar. The genes there are genes that are fully capable of making traditions come alive in ways that they haven't been.

Michael: Yeah, yeah. Amen. The other concept from Thomas Berry that I've really valued really is the next larger scale beyond the Anthropocene. He used the phrase the Ecozoic era, that in many ways, we are at the end of an era as large as the end of the Paleozoic or Mesozoic. We're bringing species to extinction. We are changing the geology, the biology and the chemistry of the planet at that scale.

He used the mythic archetype or the mythic frame of the Ecozoic era of humans coming into a mutually enhancing human/earth relationship where religions not only value ancient texts or the wisdom of the elders, but they also value the wisdom of global, collective intelligence, the wisdom of science. In fact, I remember him speaking of the four wisdom traditions, that we need all four.

We need the wisdom of indigenous peoples, the wisdom of tribal peoples, the wisdom of people who still maintain a personal, I/thou relationship with the natural world, but we also need the wisdom of the classical, religious traditions.

We also need the wisdom of women, which is not the same as the wisdom of men and we need the wisdom of science and all four of these; the wisdom of indigenous cultures, the wisdom of the classical religious civilization and traditions, the wisdom of women and the wisdom of science; all are called forth and needed at this time in history.

Larry: Yeah. I just finished, last week, together with 35 other folks, a week in a 10-year project at Ghost Ranch, here in northern New Mexico. Most people know Ghost Ranch as the home of the artist Georgia O'Keeffe, but it's a retreat and conference center. At the Presbyterian

church, nine or so years ago, I proposed a 10-year project on earth-honoring faith at Ghost ranch. We just completed year seven.

Year seven was women's wisdom and it was four rooted women's traditions, native women's, African-American, Latina and Anglo, now that doesn't cover all by any means, but we had a week together.

Michael: That's fabulous.

Larry: They talked across cultures and across traditions about what women's wisdom brings to earth-honoring faith. The next summer at Ghost Ranch – this is an annual June seminar – the Earth-honoring Faith seminar will be in the midst of new dimensions, native wisdom and dialogue. The focus there is on indigenous wisdom. You're mentioning four wisdom traditions. We're presently trying to work around a couple of those and have done others before and will do others later. I fully concur and it has to be an integration of them.

Michael: Yes, yes. Exactly. One of the things that I've been preaching a lot this year is what I'm calling the evidential reformation or religion 3.0. That is religion 1.0 being the valuing of the collective intelligence of the elders, the authority of elders you could say. Religion 2.0 is the authority of scripture, the authority of the sacred text, which of course, is also collective intelligence because the text that we now regard as cannon, as inspired scripture were debated and argued about in the third and fourth centuries.

It was really the collective intelligence of those groups of, mostly men, who were involved in those decisions that we value. Now, religion 3.0 I see as valuing the authority of evidence, the authority of global collective intelligence, which is infusing and actually making serious inroads into all religious faiths as religious leaders come to fully embrace an ecologic, evolutionary worldview.

They're bringing this evidential, the sacred science or evidential perspective, into their religious traditions and, of course, it's also happening outside the church or outside organized religion as well. I've identified what I – I'd love to hear what you think about these. I've identified what I think are six core points that unite tens of millions of us, religious and secular alike, around not a certain set of beliefs, but a certain set of values, priorities and commitments that we share.

These can all be articulated either in a both religious and secular way or just a secular way. I'll first articulate them in a combination using a secular word and a religious word. Reality is our God. Evidence is our scripture. Big history is our creation story. Ecology is our theology. Integrity is our salvation and what I mean by integrity are the practices of living in right relationship to reality.

Ensuring a just and healthy future is our mission. Now, to say the same thing in secular terms, reality is our ultimate commitment, that evidence is the main way reality reveals itself to us and so on and what I've found is that some religious people are allured by that kind of language, but they also want to say and or but. Some religious people, I would say it this way when I speak at devout religious circles, especially conservative.

Whatever we mean by God, the word God, it's got to include reality. Whatever we mean by scripture or divine guidance or divine communication has got to include evidence. Whatever we mean by Genesis or our sacred creation story, it's got to include big history and so on. Whatever we mean by theology has got to include ecology.

Larry: Your six phrases there are comprehensive, actually, of the wisdom tradition or wisdom traditions. You're restating them in ways that can be communicated both in secular and religious communities. What's common to all the wisdom traditions is that creation is a teacher of wisdom and measured human responsibility follows from that. It is evidence that is the basis and the wisdom comes from careful observation of reality as what, in this case, Earth and cosmos is teaching us.

That is the basis on which we measure what is appropriate response. Now, what's kind of doubly interesting for me is that in the wisdom of traditions – the wisdom traditions, let me put it differently, are the one deep religious set of traditions where you do not have a strong anthropic principle, a strong principle that everything turns on the existence of human beings.

In the wisdom traditions, the universe is not finely tuned or designed to yield human beings in the line of homosapiens. Rather, in the wisdom tradition, creation's principle is what, to use the Greek term, creation's principle is sophic, the Greek word for wisdom. The cosmos is finely tuned for wisdom's sake. The players are God and creation. Those are the partners. You and I appear within that frame. We're a single, lovely detail in a distant corner.

We're a twig on the great tree of life. We require – we're a dot that requires a big arrow that says, "You are here." I just think that that's the proper frame from understanding ourselves as a species. Now, there are lots of other traditions and in the second part of the book on earth-honoring faith I talk about the deep, shared interfaith traditions of which wisdom is one set of traditions, but you have prophetic, liberative traditions.

You have traditions of mysticism. You have traditions of the sacred or sacramentalisms. You have traditions of aestheticism and the simple life. These are shared, deep traditions. The difference between the wisdom traditions and the others that I just mentioned – well not mysticism. Mysticism shares much with the wisdom tradition, but some of the others really turn on a very strong anthropocentrism, which is not true of the mystical and the wisdom traditions.

They're different traditions and that's a virtue. People draw differently. People in prophetic, liberative traditions, they sing one another's songs of struggle. They know one another in those terms. In the aesthetic traditions, people living a simple life that's materially simple and spiritually rich, they understand each other across their religious traditions. The appropriate note to strike draws on different traditions for different purposes.

Michael: Yeah. That's great. I'm glad you mentioned all that. Here's the off-the-wall question that Connie, my wife, has invited me to ask everybody, which is, in the context of this conversation and your work in the world, if you were to invite three people to dinner or to have a beer with or whatever, in other words, if there were three people either at a dinner part where all four of you are together in the same conversation or at three different times where you have dinner or a beer or a glass of wine or whatever with three people from any time in human history, who would those three people be and why?

Larry: That's a wonderful question. It reminds me a little bit about the feature in the *New York Times* where they ask authors much the same kind of questions with respect to the writers. If you were going to invite three or four writers to have a conversation with, who would they be? That's a great question. I think I would invite some representative and I hope I can just name the person that I want to invite without knowing that person's name.

I want to invite some representative of indigenous peoples. Now, indigenous peoples vary wildly and widely from one another, but the common theme across indigenous people's place-based way of looking at things and living them out is what, many of them call, the original instruction. There's a sense that people have been giving the original instruction about how to live as people who are kin to all else.

They will say, "We're water people. We're soil people. We're bird people," and there's some original instruction that is amazingly similar across these traditions. One of the people I want to table there is someone who can pass along the original instruction of peoples who have lived for a very long time in a similar way in the same locations or if they can add original instruction with them when they've had to move or have been expelled to somewhere else.

I want that person there. I also would like Shakespeare to be around. I think human nature hasn't changed much since Shakespeare, probably not since Homer, maybe not since Cain. I'm not sure, but I want Shakespeare to be around because I think he's articulated who we are in ways that are memorable. I also want Shakespeare there because I don't think we're going to make the changes we are compelled to make apart from the art and Shakespeare presents, of course, literature and that's not the only art.

We have to have an artist and Shakespeare would be fine.

Michael: Yeah. That's great.

Larry: Another one person that we have to have is a scientist. I've got to have a scientist on board. Maybe E.O. Wilson. I don't know E.O. Wilson. He certainly doesn't know me, but E.O. Wilson has his pulse on what is happening to the whole community of life. Elizabeth Kolbert could be a good stand in as a popular earth science writer who knows what's happening – *Field Notes from a Catastrophe* and the new book on the sixth mass extinction. I think Elizabeth Kolbert, Shakespeare and our representative of original instruction.

Michael: That's great. That's great. Yeah, we just finished listening to Elizabeth's boo on the sixth mass extinction in audiobook. Probably 70% of the books that we experience now we listen to in audio. One of the things that this conversation has reminded me of, again, is another quote from Thomas Berry where he said that the universe is the primary revelation of that ultimate mystery whence all things emerge into being.

When we get that, we can't not value evidence and we also recognize our profound interrelationship and interconnectedness with all life forms as well and to live in a way that honors the past, not just the human past, but the life past and do so in a way that's a blessing to the future. I'm thrilled to hear and, of course, I knew already that you and I shared a deep appreciation for the work of Thomas Berry and, in some ways, are carrying on his legacy with our own unique gifts.

Larry, just in closing, if somebody wants to learn more about your work, obviously we've mentioned a couple of your books but, where would you recommend folks go to learn more about your work or to go more deeply into it?

Larry: Yeah, thank you for the invitation. Well, I did pour heart, soul and mind into this most recent book, *Earth-honoring Faith*. That would be the place I would send people as far as the literature is concerned. I also mentioned the project, the decade project at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu, New Mexico with its annual seminar. I would invite people to check www.ghost ranch.org to be up to date on that.

I mentioned that we just finished, actually, what is the first of two weeks this year on women's wisdom. The second week is in October, October 13 through 17. We managed to pull off a little coup there. Again, the focus is on women's wisdom. The three participants are Alice Walker, people will know from her wonderful work, not just *The Color Purple*, but lots of work.

She is truly an earth-healing figure. Alice Walker will be joined by Gloria Steinem and [Inaudible 58:06] from Union Seminary, a wonderful Korean, eco-feminist. That's not my work, but that's the occasion that represents the project on earth-honoring faith. It's other people's work and I'm just glad to be responsible for helping to organize it.

Michael: Yeah, well amen and one of the things, again, that gives me some hope is that we are seeing earth-honoring faith emerging in virtually every religious tradition as well as outside organized religion. I want to put in an amen for Ghost Ranch. Just a few years ago Connie and I were the theme speakers for a weeklong event there. We've been invited back and it's a divine location and soul nourishing and really intellectually rich and stimulating as well, especially with the kinds of programs that you're now talking about.

Well Larry, thank you so much for being a part of this series, for this great conversation and I'm just a deep bow of gratitude and I honor the work that you're doing and the fact that you've been active, so active, also in retirement. That's a good model for those – I'm only 55, so I'm not quite there yet, but you're doing the great work, what Thomas Berry called the great work and I just so appreciate you for being an older brother on the path and an inspiration for me in so many ways now for a couple of decades.

Larry: Yeah, thanks so much, Michael.

Michael: Thank you.