

WE ARE THE 99

Sources:

- <https://www.oed.com>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism#Causes_and_motivations
- <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/15/fact-sheet-national-strategy-for-counteracting-domestic-terrorism/>
- Talking Heads, Nothing but Flowers

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be always and everywhere acceptable in your sight, O Creator God.

It is the anniversary of 9/11. (silence)

AND

It is the season of Creation. That AND is important to me because there are ways in which they are interwoven in the same fabric. The human species is engaged in a long, drawn-out act of terrorism on our world. We are the 99 and our relationship with our environment is the lost coin, lost sheep. We are the 99.

AND

We are people of hope. There are solutions and to find those we need to name causes. And with those causes, God is calling us to the humility which recognizes our part in those causes and the

repentance that leads to healing. In no particular order then, let us look at the causes of terrorism and see how they reflect on our Creation. I will be generalizing at times because even the most eco-minded among us has benefitted from the terrorism enacted on our home Planet. First a definition of terrorism from the Oxford English Dictionary.

1. Government by intimidation.
2. Unofficial or unauthorized use of violence or intimidation for political aims.

Causes for terrorism:

1. Choice to use it as a tactic. We can see that with governments over people. How does that work with the environment? For me, it is the use and abuse of the word “dominion.” Ever since there was a book of Genesis, people have zeroed in on that word “dominion” in chapter one—have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the heavens, and all living things that crawl about upon the earth! (Fox translation)—and seen it as license to use our governing of the planet to intimidate and control and everything and everyone on it. We choose to rationalize and call ourselves rational. We’ll see that rationalizing in other causes.

2. Separatism. Among humans that is evident with religious persecutions, racist policies, etc. Regarding the environment, it is the great crime of thinking we are somehow outside the environment. When we don't have a sense of connection and kinship with all life, we fall into the dangers of "othering" which can rapidly lead to conquering. Instead, we could look to St. Francis and to other traditions that hold up the connections among all life.
3. Irredentism. This is the idea that we have the right occupy unused or "un-redeemed" land. Wow. This kind of terrorism hardly needs any translation for Creation Care. I remember a politician talking about the tundra in Alaska and saying it wasn't all that pretty, so we should destroy it for oil. I once heard a person ask, disparagingly, "what are the elephant seals FOR?" And she went on to say it was stupid to save them since there was no human use for them. Why save the condors when that money could be used for – you fill in the blank.
4. Supremacism. Humans, and especially White Europeans are good at that. I honor the late Queen for un-colonising, for her great triumph of LOSING the Empire. Certainly, there is a long human history of people declaring their supremacy over others and denying them basic human rights.

Creation? Absolutely. People have wiped out species, drained swamps—actually the homes of some of the most significant biodiversity on the planet; we have leveled mountains and left in their place heaps of slag; we have poisoned water, air, and earth—all in the name of our superiority over other living things. Our comfort, our wants and desires, our notions of cleanliness—all these drive our rationalism that we are superior so these environmental casualties do not matter.

5. Religious. Back to “dominion.” It is God’s will, right? Concerning Creation, we may ignore whole swathes of scripture, we may not even darken the door of a house of worship, and regarding Creation, most of our species have taken dominion to heart.

Las Vegas receives 90% of its water supply from the Colorado River via Lake Mead. The Lake Mead Reservoir (the largest reservoir in the United States) was created when nearby Hoover Dam was built. The remaining 10% of Las Vegas’s water supply comes from natural aquifers located deep underground. The Colorado River derives its water source from melting snow in the Rocky Mountains. (August 7, 2022, feelingvegas.com) The state of Colorado depends only on snowfall. That snow is decreasing and melting faster because

of human caused climate change. We have made false idols out of desert oases and limitless population and housing. Our religion needs to step outside of the human-centric dominion to the humility of caretaking and being part of the fabric of Creation.

6. Ending perceived oppressions. Governments, people, and factions use lies and propaganda to rationalize violence all the time.

We humans are the great adaptors. I was and continues for many to be a struggle to survive. Humanity migrated north and lost our skin pigmentation to adapt to northern climates. We learned how to make shelter, make fire, to heal wounds. We learned what was safe to eat. We learned how to cultivate. We learned how to store food, including how to cure, cook, and *ferment*, so we had grain and wine and oil—the Holy Trinity of civilization. We domesticated animals to protect us and our harvest, to feed and clothe us, and to bear us and our burdens as we traveled farther.

And then, we wanted to go faster than our horses. At some point with the Industrial Revolution adaptation yielded to oppression. Nothing will be denied us.

No source of clean drinking water? I'll use plastic bottles of water shipped from somewhere else.

I want the latest iPhone and I am not going to think about the minerals needed to make it or the people whose lives are spent getting those minerals.

We live in flood zones and in forests that need to burn and ignore the rhythm of nature that precedes us.

I love the human spirit, I really do. I love what we have accomplished. And still I believe we are called to accomplish something greater. Instead of rationalizing, our **humility** added to our **ability** will help us find a way to live with our Creation without oppressing it.

7. Our last kind of terrorism is Tit for Tat. Protestants and Catholics. India and Pakistan. Israel and Palestine. Hutus and Tutsis. We will rationalize violence unto others because it was done unto us.

Creation: Oh how we rationalize!

The levees broke? We must build stronger levees.

We rationalize the slaughter of whales, sharks, bats, insects, coyotes, wolves, etc. because they have caused us some harm, even if it's merely economic. We have not understood the balance of predator and prey.

We have rationalized filling our homes with dangerous human made substances in some notion of cleanliness more like genocide that will allow for no other lives in our homes.

We, who once had livestock in our homes just a few centuries ago, cannot abide a bug. Yes, I'm generalizing. I'm angry. We poison our yards; grow grass that steals water and provides no home or nurture to anything; the deer, turkey, squirrels, rabbits, bugs, gophers, etc. in our yard are nuisances to be killed.

Okay, enough with the causes. My main point is we are all indicted for the sin of rationalizing terrorism against creation. And we are called on to seek the lost and restore the right relationships between ourselves and Creation. On to the solutions.

Solutions—I'm modifying steps published by our government in June of 2021. And, oddly, there isn't a word for the opposite of terrorism. Isn't that sad? There is counter-terrorism. What should the word be for our Creation Care solutions? From the wineries, I am thinking Terroir, which means the complete natural environment in which a particular wine is produced, including factors such as the soil, topography, and climate. We are the wine. All life is the wine.

1. So the first step is Research and analysis: understand threats. What can we all do individually and in our environment right here to acknowledge our participation and

do the repentance. Repentance in Greek is metanoia, and it means a change of mind. Share information. Be transnational—this goes beyond human-made boundaries. Water moves from state to state, from nation to nation, from continent to continent. Animals and birds migrate through vast areas and don't recognize national park boundaries or state lines. It will help if we all understand our place and the place of our voiceless neighbors in the great tapestry.

2. Prevent. For the Creation, there are so many resources and solutions. Aim for progress, not perfection. What can you do a little bit differently? I know we have marvelous ideas from our Earth Care Committee. I have other resources and so does the county. I'm always happy to brainstorm.
3. Disrupt & Deter: legislative reforms and screening and vetting. Press candidates from the local to the national to make the environment a priority. Support the lobbyists—yep, there are good lobbyists—who work with elected officials. When a candidate is obsessed with gender definitions or abortion or banning books, or “regime change,” work to get the conversation changed to Climate. This democracy is a participatory sport. There are great nonpartisan groups like

the League of Women Voters who have strong stands on the environment. Join.

4. Confront long term contributors to terrorism: racism, gun control, early intervention, education. Well. We don't have to change too much for a spotlight on creation care do we? Environmental destruction is inextricably linked to racism, poverty, and all kinds of othering. The poor and BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color) are always affected the worst by the toxic plant built in the neighborhood or the dirty water or the natural disasters exacerbated by human action. We must look at our own ISMs and repent—remember that means to change your mind.

On September 1, Qasim Rashid, a lawyer, husband to a business-woman, and terrible dad joke maker whom I am honored to call a friend wrote: Pakistan floods have:

- Killed 1300+ people
- Displaced 50M people
- Killed 80% of the livestock
- Submerged 33% of the country
- Entirely destroyed 600K homes
- Created a lake that is visible from space

If Pakistan were a Western nation we'd see 24/7 coverage. Pakistanis need us to raise our voices. And then act.

He has so far raised \$250,000.

So, in addition to our politicians we need a vibrant, thriving press.

And that press will only show us what we ask for. Let's put the

pressure on for more world coverage. We are one people, one planet, and we are called by the Spirit to view all of Creation as our family.

Homer Simpson says “Beer, the cause and solution to all our problems.” I’d like to modify that to say humankind may be the cause of many of our problems, and we are also the solution.

In 2019, we were graced by a visit from Margaret Bullit-Jonas, Missioner for Creation Care in Massachusetts. She recently wrote these words to me: (page 11)

(we can get used to this lifestyle) Have faith and hope and love. We are the 99 and with God’s help, our relationship with our one world can be made whole. Amen.

David Vryhof, SSJE: Repentance: We've been reading a lot recently about the looming ecological crisis our world is facing. What has God been saying to us that we have chosen to ignore? Have we been unwilling to repent, to change our ways in response to the warnings we are receiving? Discernment and wisdom are needed to recognize the signs of the times, to perceive the presence and activity of the Divine, and to determine what form our repentance should take.

Keith Nelson, SSJE: As agents of Christ's regeneration, we each occupy a vital niche in this global web of greatest need. What we do matters, but what and how we love from the center of a new self matters most of all: how we love every molecule of soil, every tree, and every human life for whom Christ 'descended into the lower parts of the earth' and 'ascended far above all heavens, so that he might fill all things.'

Margaret Bullitt-Jonas: Henri Nouwen used to speak about what it means to live an ecstatic life. Ex + stasis = out of the stuck place, out of the box. We live an ecstatic life when everything we do is intended for healing—healing our relationships with other human beings, with Earth, and all her creatures, with God. Living an ecstatic life means turning away from violence—including doing everything we can to extricate ourselves from (and to transform) an economic system that is destroying life on earth. What healing can I/we do today? Witnessing or participating in violence calls us to take up what Desmond Tutu calls “the supreme work” of Jesus Christ, who reconciles us to each other, to God, and to the Whole Creation.