

Final Report to the Center for Environmental Justice and Sustainability on my 2013-14 Faculty Fellowship

By Wes Howard-Brook

I received the Fellowship to complete research and begin writing a book that follows my previous, *“Come Out, My People!”: God’s Call Out of Empire In the Bible and Beyond* (Orbis 2010). Specifically, the CEJS Fellowship supported the theme within the book regarding how what became Catholic Christianity in the 2nd-5th centuries radically changed the understanding of the relationships among God, creation, and humanity from that of Jesus and the biblical writers gathered under my rubric, the “religion of creation.”

I completed this research during the Fellowship year and began writing of the book at the end of Spring Quarter 2014. The research revealed the following major points:

1. Whereas the religion of creation texts in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament celebrate God’s presence in and human stewardship responsibility for creation, the early church writers almost completely ignore this sacred presence in creation.
2. The church writers were grounded in Hellenistic philosophical presuppositions about the hierarchical relationships among God, humans and the earth, which included seeing all of creation as existing solely for human use, rather than as valuable and revelatory on its own.
3. The church writers were unanimously from the urban elite within the Roman Empire and lived within cities, other than the so-called “desert fathers” who left the city for the “emptiness” of the desert. It was precisely the perceived *emptiness* of the desert that drew them there, rather than the possibility of finding God’s presence within the creation itself.
4. The church writers accepted the gendering of creation as female within a misogynist worldview in which elite men dominated both human women and the “female” earth.
5. Scriptural texts that appear to show divine concern for creation were interpreted allegorically, usually about the relationship between God/Christ and the individual “soul.” The classic example is Origen’s interpretation of the Song of Songs.

During the Fellowship year, I presented my preliminary findings at a CEJS dinner for a general audience.

At this time, I have completed the draft of approximately one-third of the book manuscript. Given teaching and other SU responsibilities that limit my writing time during the school year, I anticipate completing the book in Summer 2015, with an anticipated publication date of Spring 2016.

I have attached a precis of the book to this Report.