THIS SACRED LIFE

In a time of climate change, environmental degradation, and social injustice, the question of the value and purpose of human life has become urgent. But not just human life. The fate of *all* life seems to be hanging in the balance. What are the grounds for hope in a wounded world? *This Sacred Life* gives a deep philosophical and religious articulation of humanity's identity and vocation by rooting people in a divinely created, symbiotic, meshwork world that is saturated with sacred gifts. The benefits of artificial intelligence and genetic enhancement notwithstanding, this book shows how an account of humans as interdependent and vulnerable creatures orients people to be a creative, healing presence in a degraded world. It argues that the commodification of places and creatures needs to be resisted so that all life can be cherished and celebrated. Humanity's fundamental vocation is to bear witness to God's love for creaturely life, and to commit to the construction of a hospitable and beautiful world.

Norman Wirzba is Gilbert T. Rowe Distinguished Professor of Theology at Duke University Divinity School and Senior Fellow at Duke's Kenan Institute for Ethics. He is the award-winning author of *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*, *From Nature to Creation*, and *Way of Love*.

Advance Praise for *This Sacred Life*

"How can we live with hope in the midst of a deeply wounded world? In prose as lucid in style as it is illuminating in content, Norman Wirzba's *This Sacred Life* builds a patient, forceful, and elegant case that knowing *where* we are is crucial to understanding both *who* we are as human beings and *how* we are to live in ways that nourish our own being together with that of the world that sustains us. Drawing on biology, ecology, anthropology, economics, and psychology as well as theology to show how our lives are densely interwoven with the well-being of soil, air, and water, he provides an arresting vision of the gift such a rooted and entangled life can be."

Ian A. McFarland, Robert W. Woodruff Professor of Theology, Candler School of Theology, and quondam Regius Professor of Divinity, University of Cambridge

"*This Sacred Life* answers an urgent question: What do theology and religion have to offer in healing the wounds inflicted on this living planet by an unbridled and ravenous capitalism? What is the point of human existence in an Anthropocene world? Wirzba's judicious and thoughtful reflections on the human situation today draw creatively on Christian, Jewish, and Indigenous traditions while being always in conversation with a wide range of thinkers, both past and contemporary, on questions concerning capitalism, colonial domination, race, gender, and sexuality. The result is a book that successfully lays the groundwork for an ethic of caring for the Earth and the various forms of creaturely life that inhabit it. A must-read for all students of the Anthropocene."

Dipesh Chakrabarty, Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor of History, South Asian Languages and Civilizations, and the College, University of Chicago

"Norman Wirzba has long been one of the most perceptive observers of our predicament, and this fine book encapsulates so much of his wisdom. You will come out of it feeling a greater sense of what the author calls 'creatureliness,' and that will be both a comfort and a goad to do the work that must be done to preserve the possibilities of this wonderful planet."

Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*

"There is no more important interpreter of how to envision thriving life with the living planet than Norman Wirzba. [He] writes in ways that bring the religious and the nonreligious, the Christian and non-Christian into a shared perception of the problems and possibilities of healthy creaturely life. This beautifully rendered account of the sacrality of life offers what so many writing today on ecology, ecotheology, or environmental ethics struggle to achieve – a coherent and compelling vision of the human creature. This is a book that sings!"

Willie James Jennings, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Africana Studies, Yale University

"Norman Wirzba's *This Sacred Life* is a timely book that equips us ethically, ecologically, and epistemologically to address the multiple manmade emergencies we face: a health pandemic, climate havoc, biodiversity erosion and species extinction, and intolerable, brutal inequality and divisions. He takes us on a journey through the barren landscape of the desacralization of the earth and humanity that lies at the roots of these crises. This book is an invitation to take another path in which people practice the art of being creatures and members of one Earth Family, of receiving and giving life to create an abundant and flourishing world. *This Sacred Life* shows that we can reclaim the sacred by regenerating the Earth."

Vandana Shiva, author of *Reclaiming the Commons* and *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis*

"In *This Sacred Life*, Norman Wirzba has written a book of immense generosity and astonishing intellectual range. At once down-to-earth and lyrical, graciously practical and deeply contemplative, the book offers a powerful rebuke to the misanthropy and cynicism of our age. It will guide and inspire generations to come."

Tim Ingold, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen

"Norman Wirzba's writings have been a beacon of wisdom for me. *This Sacred Life* is a feast, an eye-opening exploration of the terrain toward a generative life, as well as a needed critique of the forces of dehumanization of our culture. *This Sacred Life* affirms deeply my call to be an artist, and the call to create beauty despite the darkness and traumas of our times."

Makoto Fujimura, artist and author of *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making*

"In this corker of a book, Norman Wirzba, one of the foremost contributors to environmental philosophy and theology, addresses the modern Western problem of rootlessness – not just from soil and land but from self and a sense of purpose. Grounding his constructive vision in a theology of creation, he finds that this creaturely life (which encompasses the stars and the microorganism as well as ourselves) 'is not simply the object of God's love but its material manifestation.' Wirzba writes with an ease that welcomes every reader, and an erudition that will benefit all."

Janet Soskice, William K Warren Distinguished Research Professor of Catholic Theology, The Divinity School, Duke University

"Passionate, pioneering, prophetic. Wirzba delivers an urgent call to live creatively in a sacred world saturated with wounds. He ushers us beyond our critical Anthropocene condition to a timely – and salvific – reconnection with the earth."

Richard Kearney, Charles Seelig Chair of Philosophy, Boston College, and author of *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense*

"Wirzba is not only extraordinarily perceptive about our 'wounded world' and the profound questions with which it faces us, he is also deeply convincing on how to live well with others in it. The secret is to receive life as utterly sacred, a gift of the divine love that is embodied in Jesus and that is to be shared in lives of love. The result is a wise, powerfully attractive book that deserves to be life-shaping for its readers."

David F. Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity Emeritus, University of Cambridge

"No one I know can crosswalk between religious studies and environmental studies with the acuity and grace of Norman Wirzba. In *This Sacred Life,* he does not shirk from asking *and answering* some of the biggest questions facing humankind at this pivotal moment in our history. If our Creator offers us unconditional 'tough love' to guide us through moral dilemmas, then Wirzba offers us a kind of 'tough hope' that can help us make it through this dark night."

Gary Paul Nabhan, AKA Brother Coyote OEF, author of *Jesus for Farmers and Fishers* and *Food From the Radical Center: Healing Our Land and Communities*

"Like the best of poems, this is a book that does what it says: it is a work of sustained attention – to historical contingencies, ecological complexities, ethical imperatives, and spiritual rediscoveries – that brings creative imagination as well as intellectual discernment to the reaffirmation of creaturely coexistence. Underpinned by a profound understanding of Christian texts and traditions, together with a keen awareness of the wrongs to which they have been welded, Wirzba's meditations are richly and respectfully informed by others as well, especially Jewish and First Nations."

Kate Rigby, Professor of Environmental Humanities, Bath Spa University, and author of *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism*, *Dancing with Disaster: Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times*, and *Reclaiming Romanticism: Towards an Ecopoetics of Decolonization*

"Generously conversant with a wide range of thinkers, Wirzba's holistic theology of creation makes an important intervention in Anthropocene discourse. Critiquing proposals that take human control or transcendence as premise, yet without conceding to recent pessimism toward the concept of humanity, Wirzba's way of unfolding a Christian vision of humans made to affirm, celebrate, and creatively participate in earthly life should stimulate conversation in theology and, more broadly, across the humanities."

Willis Jenkins, John Allen Hollingsworth Professor of Ethics, University of Virginia

"After the first two chapters' diving deeply into the painful wounds of our world, the reader is amply rewarded. Discernments for our soil-bound life in a

meshwork, where rootedness and entanglement are crucial, encourage thinking and acting otherwise. Countervailing power emerges in a polyphonic and widely read dialogue with Ingold, Levinas, Bonhoeffer, and many others. Wirzba's vision of life as a sacred gift and our resonance in sympathetic co-becoming accumulates an overwhelming amount of hope and faith that deserves a widespread open-minded readership."

Sigurd Bergmann, Emeritus Professor in Religious Studies (Trondheim, Lund, Uppsala, Munich)

"Scriptures have said so 'from the beginning' while theologians have asserted for centuries that creation is a sacred gift and invites a sacred vocation. Wirzba articulately, delicately, and exactingly fleshes out the implications of this premise for a deeper sensibility and sympathetic community, for transparent economies and a participatory democracy, as well as for self-conscious city-building with life-supporting infrastructures. His appeal to a world afflicted by discontent and affected by a pandemic is to reimagine creation and creatures as being and living together, to reflect on where we are and who we are in order, as T. S. Elliot says, to 'know the place for the first time.'"

John Chryssavgis, author of *Creation as Sacrament*

"For many secularists and believers alike, God and creaturely life are more like enemies than friends. *This Sacred Life* is one sustained argument for the conviction that to love God rightly is to love life, and that, inversely, to love life rightly is to love God. This is an important, compelling, and urgently needed book."

Miroslav Volf, Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology, Yale University

This Sacred Life

Humanity's Place in a Wounded World

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For my grandfather Wilhelm Roepke, who witnessed too many of this world's wounds, and still taught me that life is sacred.

We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds.
Etty Hillesum, October 13, 1943, *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries, 1941–1943*, 231

Contents

Preface

This book focuses on three fundamental questions:

(1) Where are you?
(2) Who are you?
(3) How should you live?

They can be rephrased in multiple ways, like:

(1) What kind of place is planet Earth? An extraction zone? Paradise? A warehouse stocked with natural resources? A stage for the human dramas enacted upon it?
(2) What kind of being is a human being? A random effect of long evolutionary processes? A master of Earth? A unit of production? A child of God?
(3) Does our striving have larger, perhaps even cosmic, significance? When is a human life praiseworthy? Is love really worth the effort? Dare we have hope?

I recognize that these are complex questions that call for detailed, nuanced, and lengthy treatment. Scores of books have done that. My aim, therefore, cannot be to give a definitive statement of any of them. It is, instead, to explore how these questions, *by being considered together*, might prompt a fresh understanding of each. My underlying assumption is that the logics animating our thinking about the questions *where*, *who*, and *how* illuminate and shape each other in important ways that have not always been adequately appreciated. For instance, if you believe yourself to be in a kitchen, you will also accept that this is a place where cooks and bakers belong, and where cooking and baking are appropriate ways of behaving. The place speaks to who you are and what you should do. Similarly, what you believe about yourself shapes your behaviors and beliefs. If you do not

believe yourself to be a cook, kitchens are not places of belonging, and cooking is definitely not your thing. Bedlam and frustration will inevitably ensue if you think kitchens are places to practice gymnastics, or if you try to prepare a meal on a concert hall stage.

For a growing number of people, much of the world now appears as a store or website stocked with products ready for purchase. In part, this is because an enormous amount of effort and a massive infrastructure consisting of mines, factories, warehouses, distributions centers, and transportation lines have been devoted to commodifying places and creatures, and then making them available to people to buy them. Shopping has become the dominant activity whereby many people now secure the things they need to live. It has also become a primary means through which people construct their identities and measure their success. What you buy and own says a lot about who you are and whether or not you have "made it." The logics of the store, the consumer, and shopping hang together and reinforce each other.

For many others, the world has registered primarily as a place of toil. Consider the vast numbers of peasants that, historically and in terms of demographic percentages, have dominated the populations of multiple continents. For them, the world certainly provides for their needs, but it does not appear as a store, nor is shopping the activity that defines their identities. Foraging, planting, harvesting, herding, butchering, weaving, crafting – these are some of the practices that, when successfully performed, enable survival, if not the ability to flourish. The tasks you perform and the skills you master determine your place in a community and ground your identity and vocation. Here the logics of the landholding, the peasantry, and agrarian work hang together and reinforce each other.

Many people from across the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and fine arts argue that we are now living in an Anthropocene world. How the Anthropocene came about and what it means are the subject of this book's first chapter. Briefly stated, however, the arrival of an Anthropocene epoch marks the moment when (some) humans became the dominant force in planetary history, responsible for the widespread alteration of the world's land, ocean, atmospheric, and life systems. Although planetary systems and biological processes are still clearly at work, their expressions and effects can no longer be understood apart from human activity. Ranging from the cellular to the atmospheric levels, there is no place or process on Earth that does not reflect humanity's technological prowess and its economic reach. Is this a good and welcome development?

The young people I talk to are not so sure, because the world they inhabit is a deeply wounded world. They often express the sentiment that they are

caught between a past punctuated with far too much violence and abuse, and a future of greatly diminished prospects and dreams. Many wonder if it is irresponsible of them to have children. As they see it, the dawning of an Anthropocene world has confused mainstream attempts to answer this book's three fundamental questions. Why has the expansion of human freedom and power (for some) gone hand in hand with the contraction of the worlds in which (many) people will seek to realize either? The multiple crises of sustainability, justice, meaning, and purpose have cast considerable doubt, if not derision, on the inherited answers to what a human life is for and what work is valuable to perform. They argue that the many fault lines revealed by COVID-19, systemic racial injustice, wealth consolidation and inequality, and the mounting, visible threat of climate change compel a fundamental rethinking of the principles and priorities that have brought us to where we now are. Humanity and Earth are at a crossroads. Their bottom line? The paradigms and policies that have led us into this mess are unlikely to inspire or lead us into a more hopeful future.

What sort of world has emerged in this Anthropocene epoch? Human efforts to design and engineer farms, forests, transportation networks, factories, and urban built environments, while clearly producing multiple comforts and conveniences for a growing number of people, have also *depended on* and *required* the destruction of places and communities consigned to commodification, exploitation, monoculture, abandonment, and toxic death. Damage and degradation, ecocide and domicide – these are not simply unforeseen outcomes in the various marches of progress. They are essential ingredients, and thus also the more or less acceptable costs, of the dominant models of economic growth and development we see today. But what sort of culture pursues the creation of a world that is becoming increasingly uninhabitable for human beings and for the millions of species that share the planet with them?

What about its people? The Anthropocene logic that sanctions the degradation of the world's places will simultaneously be applied to its people as well. If the world is becoming increasingly uninhabitable, many of its people are now being recast as irrelevant, disposable, or obsolete. That human life has often been considered cheap is not news. Cultures across the globe have long been committed to versions of progress and development that *depended on* and *required* the forced labor, enslavement, conscription, imprisonment, and genocide of innumerable people. These histories demonstrate that the humanity of vast numbers of people has been regularly denied. Whether cast as barbarians, savages, infidels, disposable units of production, or "three-fifths of a man," these people and (increasingly) their masters are now being replaced by stronger, smarter, and more efficient machines. The current question is whether the category of humanity itself should be retained. But in

losing the ability to speak clearly about an authentic human life, do we not also lose the ability to speak clearly against a culture's *in*humanity? Or, as Paul Gilroy has recently asked, how, in a world of rising seas and sinking prospects, will we establish new sympathies and solidarities for one another, and their accompanying modes of accountability, apart from a defense of a re-enchanted and healed humanity?[1] Advances in robotics, artificial intelligence, genetics, and bio- and nano-technology are raising the prospect of a posthuman future. But what sort of society yearns for the invention of technological devices and platforms that render its people as burdens and irritants (at best), or as dispensable and despicable (at worst)?

What is the point of human life in an Anthropocene world? As Achille Mbembe has argued, the privatization of the globe under the banner of neoliberalism, and the reduction of people and places to the roles that they play in financial markets means that people around the world increasingly register as "laboring nomads," feeling abandoned and, in multiple instances, deemed superfluous.[2] The perceived irrelevance of people goes conjointly with the erosion of a life's meaning and purpose. As the various skills and

[1] In his 2014 Tanner Lectures on Human Values "Suffering and Infrahumanity" and "Humanity and a New Humanism," Paul Gilroy argues that the academic turn to post- and anti-humanist discourses, understandable as they are given modernity's violent history, have precious little to offer the "legions of the drowned" who are victims of injustice. The call to interspecies life does not sound so appealing to people who have been systematically brutalized and consigned to a bestial existence. Gilroy follows Frantz Fanon in his call to "invent a man in full" that redresses the crimes of modern humanist traditions, "the racial hatred, slavery, exploitation and, above all, the bloodless genocide whereby one and a half billion men have been written off" (*The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox [New York: Grove Press, 2004], 238), for it is in terms of a re-enchanted humanism that we can find ways to speak meaningfully about trauma and violation, and find ways to learn empathy, practice confession, and seek forgiveness, and, perhaps, even reconciliation. This will be a "reparative humanism" that begins at the ontological level, because it is with a rethinking of what we believe human beings *are* that the degradation of people can be judged, and their welcome into communities of belonging can commence (see https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/Gilroy%20manuscript%20PDF.pdf).

[2] Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 3. Mbembe is clear that the legacy of colonialism continues today in forms of "apartheid, marginalization, and structural destitution. Global processes of accumulation and expropriation in an increasingly brutal world economic system have created new forms of violence and inequality" (161). The new "wretched of the earth" (Fanon)

> are those to whom the right to have rights is refused, those who are told not to move, those who are condemned to live within structures of confinement – camps, transit centers, the thousands of sites of detention that dot our spaces of law and policing. They are those who are turned away, deported, expelled; the clandestine, the "undocumented" – the intruders and castoffs from humanity that we want to get rid of because we think that, between them and us, there is nothing worth saving, and that they fundamentally pose a threat to our lives, our health, our well-being. The new "wretched of the earth" are the products of a brutal process of control and selection whose racial foundations we know. (177)

forms of work that gave definition and value to human lives are replaced by machines and algorithms, all designed to serve the maximization of private wealth (for some), people are left to wonder if their daily living matters. Is there a praiseworthy point to whatever effort people might muster if an app or a software program matched with a 3-D printer can do the job much better? Insofar as people are consigned to a brutalizing nomadic existence or are reduced to being the spectators and shoppers of worlds manufactured and presented by others, they also have less reason to be the creators of their own communities and built environments. The loss of the sense of one's life as a creative, skilled effort devoted to the making of a beautiful and thriving world is a loss of inestimable proportions. But what sort of civilization commits itself to the invention of a time in which people themselves and the work they do are deemed either deficient, unnecessary, or irrelevant?

This book is an extended argument for the sanctity of places, humans and fellow creatures, and the work people do. It assumes a radically different logic than the forms of thought and action that have brought us to our Anthropocene epoch. This logic is rooted in the assumption that the world is not an accidental or amoral realm that can be manipulated and exploited at will, but is instead *divinely created*, and therefore to be nurtured, cherished, and celebrated. But what does it mean to say that the world is created? As I will show, much more is at stake than a story about how the world began a long time ago. What is at issue is the meaning and significance of everything that is. By describing this world as a sacred gift to be received and shared, a moral and spiritual topography emerges that situates and orients people in their places in ways that emphasize attention, care, and respect for life that is only ever *life together*. To narrate the world as created is to affirm that reality is fundamentally good and beautiful, and a graced realm that is both hospitable to and generative of fresh and diverse life.

In a divinely created world, people are simultaneously affirmed *as beloved creatures* that are of inestimable value and worth, and that need and depend on others and God. To be a creature is to know that you are not the source of your own life but must constantly receive it in the varying forms of birth, nurture, healing, inspiration, and kinship. It is also to know that you are born – finite, vulnerable, and mortal. As I will show, the character of a distinctly human life is transformed when examined through the lens of a receiving–giving dynamic. The point of a human life changes if it affirms the good of our shared, creaturely need. No longer committed to varying versions of escape from or domination of this world – many of which are inspired by a pervasive discontent with life's finitude and frailty – human creatures can live with others in places in ways that contribute to the healing

and beautification of this world and its life. The fundamental task is to develop the improvisational skills and the artistic capacities that create homes, communities, economies, and built environments in which the diversity of places and creatures can prosper together. As Makoto Fujimura has recently described it, this essential work of *making* is not restricted to utilitarian functioning or repairing what is broken but is about participating in the divine creating power that transfigures brokenness into newness of life.[3] When people make good and beautiful things, they affirm that this world is worthy of our attention, love, and skill. I call this task humanity's enduring *sacred vocation*.

To say that life is sacred is not to say that this world and its creatures are divine. It is, instead, to signal that places, ranging from wetlands and oceans to farm fields and city neighborhoods, and creatures, ranging from earthworms and raspberry shoots to bees and people, are the embodied expressions of a divine affirmation and intention that desires for them to be and to thrive. As I will later develop, this means that this life is not simply the *object* of God's love; it is – in ways that remain incomprehensible to us – also the *material manifestation* of a divine energy that gives and nurtures and encourages diverse life without ever being exhausted or fully contained in the expression of any of its embodied forms.

In addition, to affirm that life is sacred is not to say that people will inevitably recognize it as such. As we will see, an affirmation of life's sacred character depends on the cultivation of capacities and habits that position people to *come into the presence* of others in ways that affirm their mysterious gratuity and grace. To acknowledge the sanctity of another's life is not to cast a general spiritual veneer or glow over them but to discover in their particularity the never-to-be-repeated-again expression of a divine love that delights in their becoming the unique beings that only they can become. It is to perceive in them an inexhaustible depth and sanctity that solicits attention, commands respect, and invites celebration. Recognition of this sort does not happen in contexts animated by the will to comprehend, appropriate, or control. If people hope to experience one another and their shared places as sacred gifts, everything will depend on developing the sympathetic, affective, and cognitive capacities that, along with the practices of study and care, open them to a world that, although wounded and in need of healing, is the place of God's abiding attention and love.

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[3] In *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), Makoto Fujimura says, "Through making, by honoring the brokenness, the broken shapes can somehow be a necessary component of the New World to come" (46).

In this book I develop an account of this world *as God's creation*, of humans *as creaturely beings*, and of human work *as the creative effort to contribute to a flourishing world*. The interrelation and the practical significance of the logics of creation, creatureliness, and creativity have not often been clearly understood and articulated. To make my case, I will most often draw on Jewish and Christian sources but I will also draw from other traditions, including indigenous traditions. My claim is not that these traditions are perfect or have all of the answers. Nor do I argue that Christian theology has an exclusive claim on the idea that this world and its life are sacred gifts to be cherished. The witness of history is as clear as it is depressing: The economic and political systems that have done the most harm to places and their communities of life have often been inspired, financed, and promoted by Christian institutions and their leaders. Besides being a point of considerable shame and judgment, these histories, I argue, reflect an inability, perhaps even a refusal, on the part of many Christians to understand and act upon the logic of creaturely life that their scriptures suggest. This book is, therefore, both a critique of Christian traditions, and a proposal to think differently about and live more graciously among the places and creatures God has given and constantly loves. This is ongoing work that will benefit from the insights of multiple spiritual and philosophical traditions.

Despite its length, I wrote this book as an extended *essay* in which I lay out in fairly succinct fashion the logics of creation, creatureliness, and creativity. Rather than go into detail about any particular point, or engage in sustained polemics with contrasting positions, I have often had to stay at a fairly high altitude so that the principles animating our thinking about *where*, *who*, and *how* can remain in view. I recognize that each subsection of each chapter could be a book, even a series of books, on its own. In lieu of a massive tome, I have, therefore, had to settle for occasional references to the work of others that extends or applies what I develop in skeletal form.

I also wrote this book as an exercise for others to *think with*. The questions "Where are you?," "Who are you?," and "How should you live?" are enormous, perennial, and enduring. They elude anyone's comprehensive grasp, which is why they need to be engaged regularly and rethought from multiple points of view. My hope is that others will join in this effort at this particular time as we confront an Anthropocene world in which so much – perhaps everything – is in peril. My hope is that an understanding of the world as God's creation, humans as creatures, and human life as a creative task might occasion both a rethinking and a redirection of life as we have come to realize it.

But first, it is important to have some analysis of how we have come to where we now are. Part I, "Assessing Our Situation," contains two chapters that analyze the current state of the Earth and the state of humanity. More specifically, my aim is to trace some of the developments that have brought us to an Anthropocene world and a post- or trans-humanist future, and then to examine the philosophical assumptions and commitments driving these developments. As I see it, the logics of world-making and human formation are inextricably tied together. In Part II, "Turning to Fundamentals," I describe how our embodied, lived experience necessarily roots us in this world. To appreciate the truly radical (the Latin *radix* refers us to a "root") character of this claim, I show what attending to the complexities of soils and plant life have to teach us about the nature of this rootedness. People do not simply move *on* or *across* this world but instead move *within* fields of interrelated and symbiotic life that join places, processes, and creatures in an indissoluble web, what the anthropologist Tim Ingold calls a "meshwork." These chapters do the fundamental work of recasting the nature of life and the character of this world. In Part III, "This Sacred Life," I devote specific chapters to why it matters that we affirm this world and its life as sacred, and then what it means to say that the world is created, that human life is creaturely, and that people are called to contribute creatively to the thriving and maintenance of our homes and communities. If a characterization of life as sacred is inspired by the experience of places and creatures as gifted and precious, then the essential work of human beings is to join their devotion and skill to the welcome and nurture of each other. In the making of useful and beautiful things, people demonstrate that this world and its life are worthy of their cherishing.

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