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## Listen! The Earth Speaks

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## Listen! The Earth Speaks

Cindy Rose<sup>1</sup>



This painting by Jean-François Millet, entitled *L'Angélu*,<sup>2</sup> was particularly famous in the nineteenth century. Upon viewing it, observing the body language of the people, alongside the church in the distance, initially one may conclude that Millet meant this painting to be a religious reflection. In actuality, it was not that for Millet, but rather it was reminiscent of a childhood memory of his grandmother, who would stop everyone in their daily activities to recite a ritual prayer called *L'Angélu*.<sup>3</sup>

The beautiful and timeless gift that paintings grant to humankind is the opportunity to view them with variant perspectives, as they breathe meanings of truth for each beholder. Resultant revelations may differ from the original artist's, and from one another, creating wondrous spaces of learning from one another. Reflecting on this particular painting from a theological viewpoint, the thought that whispers within, carrying a weight of personal responsibility, is, Listen! The earth speaks! If the earth could articulate through our language of words, perhaps these are some thoughts it would speak for us to hear:

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<sup>1</sup> Cindy Rose is an MA student in spiritual care and psychotherapy at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in Waterloo, Ontario. This article was submitted on November 11, 2017, as a paper in the course "Introduction to God and Theological Reflection" (TH503A), taught by Mary Joy Philip.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-François Millet, *L'Angélu*, oil on canvas (1857–59), Musée d'Orsay, Paris, public domain version retrieved from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:JEAN-FRAN%20IS\\_MILLET\\_-\\_El\\_%20%21ngelus\\_\(Museo\\_de\\_Orsay,\\_1857-1859.\\_%20%293leo\\_sobre\\_lienzo,\\_55.5\\_x\\_66\\_cm\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:JEAN-FRAN%20IS_MILLET_-_El_%20%21ngelus_(Museo_de_Orsay,_1857-1859._%20%293leo_sobre_lienzo,_55.5_x_66_cm).jpg)

<sup>3</sup> Beth Harris and Steven Zucker, "Jean-François Millet, *L'Angélu*," in *Smarthistory*, November 27, 2015, retrieved from <https://smarthistory.org/jean-francois-millet-langelus/>

*Since I, the earth, have been created, I have produced nourishment, beauty, strength, and hope. Seeds planted within me carry a faith that they will produce growth, leading to new life being formed:*

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good.<sup>4</sup>

*Time continues to pass, with many feet travelling across my back, human and animal. Yet, true today as it was yesterday, you remain dependent on me to bring forth harvest for your survival. Likewise, trees root within me, and burst forth above me, contributing to your environment with the provision of oxygen, supporting your lives as you dwell on me. Candidly, your faces are blurred to me, as there have been so many who have lived their story on my expanse. Even so, today, we both still continue to exist, needing one another. The universal truth is that I need you to protect me, plant within me, and care for me. Correspondingly, you need me in order to eat, breathe, and be refreshed. Our Creator has made us connected to each other, where together we play a role in our past, present, and future survival.*

*Together, we create a home. Stop, breathe, and reflect on what we bring each other. Value and respect me. Honour me as your equal, for the Creator made us to be in unity with each other. As a mother brings life to a child, I bring life to you, as you replant life into me. Throughout the passing of time, we remain connected to each other. O Creator, may we always grow in support of each other, continuing to reproduce the gift of life.*

*Since I, the earth, have been created, I recognize that I have been a source of frustration, disappointment, failure, and unfulfilled dreams:*

"Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"<sup>5</sup>

*Working with me, the earth, can be hard. Admittedly, I carry a propensity to be fickle. Even so, it amazes me how across my reach, laborious moments have often become your teacher of resilience and invention. The Creator never ceases to impart wisdom upon you for the circle of life to continue. Evolving together, connected to each other, we discover new pathways to sustainability of life. Know that, as the earth, I have felt your tears hit me in times of desperation. Moreover, I have absorbed your dripping sweat in times of hard work. Likewise, I hold each drop of blood that you have shed over the span of time, as you work me with blistered hands, to*

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:9–12 (New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 13:3–9.

*provide your sustenance. As such, we are connected. Although some amongst you have experienced more trying times than others, with no fruition of harvest from the seeds planted, hope endures within you as humankind.*

*Together, we create a home. Stop, breathe, and reflect on what we bring each other. Value and respect me. Honour me as your equal, for the Creator made us to be in unity with each other. As a mother brings life to a child, I bring life to you, as you replant life into me. Throughout the passing of time, we remain connected to each other. O Creator, may we always grow in support of each other, continuing to reproduce the gift of life.*

*Since I, the earth, have been created, I have been fulfilling the role the Creator set out for me. Sadly though, I have been victimized by your blindness. I have been hurt by your lack of care, rooted in the purpose of increasing your own pleasure and comfort, “symptomatic of a spiritual disease which must be addressed if we and our planet are to be healed.”<sup>6</sup> As the earth, I am responsible to provide for you, but the Creator has also passed on responsibility to you as humankind to take care of me. Please be appreciative of my gifts to you today, so I can pass along gifts for your children of tomorrow.<sup>7</sup> Some amongst you understand this, but it grieves me that many do not. This ignorance is damaging me, and although created by the Creator, I, the earth, like you, humankind, have limits. I am at your mercy, as you are at mine. Vulnerability appears through the shifts of my sand, the melting of my ice, and the drying up of my streams. Yet, hope bubbles forth with some of your growing awareness, gratitude, and recognition of my role in your past, present, and future survival. For you likewise are vulnerable to irreversible consequences. Thankfully, there is still time. Return to some of the simplicity of your ancestors. Strip away some of the human-made inventions of convenience that are hurting both of us. Find peace in the nature that I provide. Allow our spirits to connect and bring healing to each other. There is still time. Hear my plea.*

*Together, we create a home. Stop, breathe, and reflect on what we bring each other. Value and respect me. Honour me as your equal, for the Creator made us to be in unity with each other. As a mother brings life to a child, I bring life to you, as you replant life into me. Throughout the passing of time, we remain connected to each other. O Creator, may we always grow in support of each other, continuing to reproduce the gift of life.*

*Since I, the earth, have been created, I have played a role in your reality: “Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.”<sup>8</sup> Likewise, I play a role in your death: “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.”<sup>9</sup> Throughout your existence, we are forever connected in the most intimate of ways. Humankind, across the reaches of my span, from continent to continent, and century to century, during periods of war and of peace, and your best and worst behaviour, I remain ready to hold you when you reach the end of your journey. You see, we are connected together during your life, and we are connected together during your death. What a beautiful gift of support that our Creator has given us.*

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<sup>6</sup> Nelson Bock, “An Eco-theology: Toward a Spirituality of Creation and Eco-Justice,” *CrossCurrents* 63, no. 4 (2013): 434, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cros.12049>

<sup>7</sup> John Friesen, “Indigenous Perceptions of God: A Great Plains Approach,” *Touchstone* 28, no. 3 (2010): 39.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 2:7.

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 3:19.

*Together, we create a home. Stop, breathe, and reflect on what we bring each other. Value and respect me. Honour me as your equal, for the Creator made us to be in unity with each other. As a mother brings life to a child, I bring life to you, as you replant life into me. Throughout the passing of time, we remain connected to each other. O Creator, may we always grow in support of each other, continuing to reproduce the gift of life.*