

Colorado State University Libraries

Department of Philosophy

Rolston (Holmes) Collection

Transcription of History - Promised land and planet with promise, 2013-10-23

Item Metadata

Collection: Streaming Media

Creator: Rolston, Holmes, 1932-, speaker

Title: Promised land and planet with promise

Date: 2013-10-23

File Name: promised-land-planet-w-promise.mp3

Date Transcribed: Apr 2023

Transcription Platform: Konch

BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION

[00:06 - 00:52] Speaker 1: On the recording that follows, Holmes Ralston gives a talk. Promised Land and the Planet of Promise at Chapel at Eastern Mennonite University. Harrisonburg, Virginia. October 23rd, 2013. Ralston was born in the Shenandoah Valley, has roots there, and was asked to relate his interest in nature and environmental ethics to his Valley origins. Then to expand this to his contemporary global concerns.

[01:00 - 01:30] Christian Early: My name is Christian Early and I teach in the Bible and Religion department. I also sit on the steering committee of Shenandoah and a Baptist Science Society or assassin forever trying to get a Y in there so we can be sassy. We're a group of folk interested in the conversations that go on between science and religion, and it is in that capacity that I am introducing our speaker for today.

[01:32 - 02:18] Professor Holmes Ralston is distinguished professor at Colorado State University. His work has centered on the conversations among science, philosophy and religion, which is to say, he's my kind of guy. He has written many critically acclaimed books on environmental ethics. Later on today at the colloquium at 4 p.m. at Mainstage Theater, he will speak from his more recent book, Three Big Bangs, which I have just read, and it is excellent. Professor Ralston has won many awards, including the Templeton Prize.

[02:18 - 02:33] He's giving given many prestigious lectures, including the Gifford Lectures. He is, in short, among academics, at least a rock star. Please join me in welcoming him to the podium and to EMU.

[02:46 - 03:39] Holmes Raston: Thanks. It's good to be here. I've been introduced many times, many ways. But never before is a rock star. I'm not sure I'm up to that. Well, my. Well, this evening is a more academic talk this afternoon, 4:00. But this morning I want to thank perhaps in a bit more informal way. About what I might call. Gospel and landscape or promised land and planet with promise. When Christian asked me to come. I said, well. I've got to.

[03:40 - 04:10] Because my ancestors are buried at Cooks Creek Church and they would turn over in their graves if I turned down an invitation to. Convert Mennonites in Harrisonburg. I did go out yesterday and looked up a few tombstones creek.

[04:13 - 04:51] In my memories, the tradition out of which I came. Where? Scotch. Presbyterians. And they. Love the land. And the gospel. And sometimes they weren't too sure which came first. The Scots lived on a difficult landscape. They came to the United States and they found the Shenandoah Valley. Good place to live.

[04:51 - 05:37] A new land of promise. And and they combined a certain sense of living on the landscape. And and living with their Christian faith. I was born outside of Lexington. A place called Rockbridge Baths, a church called Bethesda. I grew up with mountains on two sides and the River Murray River in front of the house. I kind of had to run of that country and those people wanted to do.

[05:37 - 06:51] They saw the mountains. They kept the sense of wild nature. They saw landscape. The limestone country with with horses was good farmland, good grazing land. Didn't work out so well later for tractors because of the limestone in the field. But it was a place that they could see. Was a good land and they loved the Lord. And they had a sense that the two went together. My dad grew up on a. His father was a pastor. But in those days, pastors were expected to farm some as well. Outside of Stanton and the Hebrew Church. And even Dad. When he got to some different part of the country, there were two things he needed to know.

[06:52 - 07:33] One was where's the river and what is the river flow into? And the other was he wanted a shovel. To turn the ground and see if it would make a decent garden. I have taught for many years at Colorado State University. Many of my students would know. We're on the Bruder and Platte River. It's a forestry school as well, but not many of my students would ever ask for a shovel to turn the soil and see if it made good garden.

[07:34 - 08:16] I bet you a lot of students at Eastern Mennonite University were brought up in such a way that they would like to know whether the soul would make a decent garden. See, these people had a sense that it was a good earth. A good land. Now, I think they got that out of a biblical tradition. Deuteronomy chapter six, which I was taught in Sunday school as a child.

[08:18 - 09:07] You walk in all the way in which the Lord, your God has commanded you, that you may live and it may go well with you, and you may live long in the land which you possess. Hero Israel. Be careful to do these commandments. He will multiply greatly as to the Lord. God of your fathers has promised you. In a land flowing with milk and honey. I was given a jar of honey. Few days ago at a bed and breakfast.

[09:08 - 10:08] From the valley. Okay. They had a sense of living well in a good land, the promised Land. And they had a sense that that. Well, this Amos, the Prophet Amos put it. Plants don't flow with milk and honey unless, in the words of Amos. Justice rolls down like waters. Two, they thought of Earth as a providing ground. We might say that word. Provide is an interesting word, isn't it? Provide? Provisions. Providence.

[10:12 - 11:04] They had a sense, a biblical sense of a promised land, which God had provided. Now, in part, at least. Maybe. The Christian tradition when it. Left the land of Palestine. Lost that sense of land and landscape. I mean, you're going to heaven, aren't you? You need to be converted. And you can be a Christian anywhere on any place. And the main goal is to sort of get saved and get to heaven.

[11:05 - 12:07] Well, yes but maybe we missed out on something. And losing that sense of identification. On the landscape. If we go back to the early scriptures. In the Book of Genesis. The Earth is without form and void. Darkness is on the face of the deep. The spirit of God moves over the waters and God says. God says that there be swarms of creatures. Amen. And so be it. Well, swarms, I guess swarms is the.

[12:07 - 12:56] First way of describing what we now describe as biodiversity. And if we come forward a bit in the book of Genesis to the days of. The flood. It's interesting, isn't it? Noah is commanded to save the creatures. Even when humans are. Living lives of wickedness. Bringing God's judgment. And after. The flood when the creatures on the ark are to be released.

[12:57 - 13:26] Speaker 1: The God says, Behold, I establish my covenant with you. With you and your descendants. And with every living creature that is with you. The birds, the cattle. Every beast

of the field with you. You know, if you want to kind of word of God out of this ancient past, Genesis six, keep them alive with you.

[13:29 - 14:22] Well, it took us a long time in the United States to pass an Endangered Species Act. And when we did, we said, we want to save those. And the language of the act of aesthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, scenic value to the nation and its people. It's like Noah had a better environmental policy. Noah was told to save them all. In that sense, man. Humans are not a measure of things. I teach on a campus with a lot of biology and biology and theology. Religion are not always easy to get together.

[14:24 - 15:22] Looking past, wondering where we came from. But looking forward. Wondering what we ought to do. Biology and religion are easy to join. We need to save creation. We need to conserve the richness of life on Earth. I said that the Valley people I knew grew up. With mountains on the skyline with a sense of there being wild. And fields in the foreground. Added culture with a sense of that being domesticated.

[15:23 - 16:34] So, you know, we had this idea that. Both the wild. The natural and the agricultural. We're. In the plan of God. That's in the Old Testament. A biblical sense of faith and land combined. But if we come to the New Testament. Who? Maybe. The letters of Paul. Was all that All was all that much of a sort of country man. But if you turn to Jesus. Well, I think Jesus clearly saw the presence of God in the natural world in which he resided. He spoke.

[16:34 - 17:26] His parables are very earthy, aren't they? Birds of the air. The flowers of the field. The flowers of the field. Have more glory than the courts of Solomon. And the Earth brings forth. SOWERS So their seed and the seed grows secretly. Now, it seems to me that Jesus sensed that. The powers of the natural world were closely related to the powers bringing in the kingdom.

[17:28 - 18:21] That earth is a kind of wonder and kind of Wonder Land. In fact, if you like. The favorite psalm is the 23rd psalm perhaps. And I can give. That kind of might say. Natural interpretation of the 23rd Psalm. Isn't it about green pastures? Isn't it about? Food in green pastures. Yes. And in the valley of the shadow of death. You see, there's the idea that life continues. In the midst of struggle.

[18:24 - 19:31] I think in a way, if you sort of asked me for a Bible verse that describes the course of natural history as well as the course of human history. It might come from the prologue of John. That light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it. See, that's what I think I see. For millennia. For billions of years in the history of life on Earth, that life continues in the darkness and

the darkness does not overcome it. Humans are remarkable on this planet. We will return to that theme some.

[19:31 - 20:08] This afternoon one way in which humans are remarkable on the planet is they and they alone. No, they're on a planet. They and they alone. Have a sense of responsibility for and stewardship of life on the planet. Well, you don't like to listen to theologians or you don't like to listen to philosophers.

[20:10 - 20:56] Turn to astronauts logging scientist. Here's Edgar Mitchell. Looking at earth from space, suddenly from behind the rim of the moon. The long, slow motion motion moments of immense majesty. There emerges a blue and white jewel light, delicate sky blue sphere laced with slowly swirling veils of white, rising gradually like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery takes more than a moment. Realize this is home.

[20:59 - 22:01] Earth is a marvelous planet. The planet was promised. Let's bring the sense of a promised land forward and make it global. Rocket scientist I was just quoting. Edgar Mitchell continued that my view of our planet. Was a glimpse of divinity. We still live? Do we not? In a land of promise. Not simply in the Shenandoah Valley. But on this marvelous planet. Thank you. And take care of the Shenandoah and of the planet

END TRANSCRIPTION