

FAITH^{FOR} EARTH

A CALL FOR ACTION



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Faith for Earth: A Call for Action

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PREFACE

This book was first published at the beginning of the twenty-first century. A joint project of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Interfaith Partnership for the Environment, it was titled *Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action*. The partners printed tens of thousands of copies and gave them to schools, congregations, and communities throughout the world. The book described the growing threats to our planet's life support systems, the reverence all faiths share for life on Earth, and the responsibility that people have to future generations.

Teachers, students, leaders of religious congregations, and community organizers used the book to introduce and talk about critical environmental issues and how faith communities were addressing these issues. Intended primarily as an educational resource, it has also been used as a reference and inspiration for practice.

During the twenty years that have passed since the book's publication, the planet has undergone profound and rapid changes. The impact of our actions and choices continues to escalate, causing the ever-worsening global climate emergency, altering natural global processes and major ecosystems, accelerating extinctions of countless forms of life, and deepening human suffering on an unprecedented scale.

Scientific evidence documenting the crisis is undeniable and grows with every passing day. At the same time, there has been a surge of faith-based action and advocacy on behalf of the environment from religious groups everywhere. The response is coming from every corner of the world, reflecting both the diversity of the ways we define our relationship with nature and the essential unity of values at the core of all our hope.

As we begin this century's third decade, the new edition — produced through a partnership between the United Nations Environment Programme and the Parliament of the World's Religions Climate Action — offers an introduction to the magnitude of the task we now face and to the faith communities that are becoming a force for the global environmental future. Also, in keeping with the urgency of the work that must be done to heal our planet, we have changed the book's title. It is time, as never before, to call on our faith, our values, our religious teachings and traditions — on Faith for Earth. And it is time for action.

MESSAGE FROM THE FAITH FOR EARTH INITIATIVE OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

I am privileged to have this opportunity to welcome you to *Faith for Earth, A Call for Action*, the new, revised edition of *Earth and Faith*, last published twenty years ago. It is an honor to have worked in partnership with the Parliament of the World's Religions to produce this book.

Faith for Earth describes the essential, unshakeable reverence that all religions have for creation and nature, and provides an introduction to the world's major life support systems. I hope it will give you information and inspiration to learn more about our planet, to share your knowledge and commitment to care for it, and to become part of the flourishing global interfaith movement that is increasingly bringing people together to protect and sustain life on Earth.

In the last 60 years, more than 40% of the world's civil wars have been linked to control over natural resources such as land, oil, and water. Climate change is on track to make this situation worse, with unprecedented new impacts on the functioning ecosystems we depend upon for survival, as well as on where people can live and grow food, build cities, practice their faith, and raise their children in peace and health. The security implications of climate change are being recognized at the highest levels, and UN Secretary-General António Guterres has put it at the heart of our conflict prevention agenda.

The Secretary-General announced in April 2020 that “the global crisis we are facing today due to the COVID-19 pandemic is the gravest challenge since the establishment of the UN 75 years ago,” but it also remains an irrefutable fact that climate change continues to be one of the most systemic environmental threats that humankind has ever faced.

We are in a race against time that will require political will, innovation, inclusion, tolerance, values and ethics, financing, and partnerships. We are calling on everyone—countries, cities, the private sector, individuals, and faith-based organizations—to strengthen their actions to mitigate climate change, restore ecosystems, and protect the health of the planet without delay. The world has the scientific understanding, the technological capacity, and the financial means to do this. We need to trust our abilities and act accordingly.

Let us adopt an integrated approach to tackling the cry of the planet and achieving sustainable development. The private sector is already taking various actions to ensure environmental sustainability through sustainability budgeting and innovations. Many in the financial sector know that investing in a clean energy future and nature-based solutions will pay dividends.

We need to think about how we commute and about the sustainability of our houses and buildings. Are we encouraging means of mass transportation? Are we reducing the need to commute by encouraging working from home and using smart phones and computers for transactions? Do our buildings produce their own energy? Do they recycle their own water? Are we treating and recycling our waste and moving to adopt a circular economy with zero waste?

Are we eating healthy food? Are we buying locally grown vegetables? Or are we importing off-season produce from countries that are thousands of miles away?

Technology is on our side. Our challenge is not that we do not know what to do—it is how quickly we can do it. The problem is massive, and such large and complex challenges will require transformational thinking, integration, and big movements. But it will also require progress on myriad smaller and manageable scales. We need faith-based organizations to be part of the global accountability and monitoring system to achieve sustainable development goals, and we need a common ethical system of values no matter what religion we believe.

I write this with hope and optimism because I am convinced that the love for power and greed that led us to where we are today can be overcome by the power of love, science, and faith.

The UN has adopted Global Action for People and the Planet, its global environmental agenda, through 2030, but the faith agenda is eternity. Our concern should not be the just next generation; it should be all generations to come. We must make a global pact, on behalf of the natural world, to bring the values of faith to the practices of people and decisions of politicians. We need to work with the environment to avoid new global catastrophes. I call upon all the faith communities in the world to lead by example and join our Coalition in putting our Faith for Earth into action today.

*Iyad Abumoghli, Ph.D. Eng.
Director, Faith for Earth Strategic Engagement with Faith-based Organizations
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Nairobi, Kenya*

PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH

Faith-based organizations own 8% of the habitable land surface, 5% of all commercial forests, 50% of the schools in the world and 64% of schools in sub-Saharan Africa, 10% of world's total financial institutions, and 14% of its community development corporations.

There are 37 million churches in the world with 34,000 (Christian) denominations. The current number of mosques in the world is around 4 million. There are 20,000 synagogues and countless temples.

Adapting these establishments to produce their own energy, reduce their carbon footprint, and extend these benefits to neighboring communities will be a massive demonstration of practicing what we preach.

MESSAGE FROM PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS CLIMATE ACTION

Two decades into the 21st century, we know far more about the complex web of forces and influences that determine the interconnected relationship between humans and nature than we did when the previous edition of this book was published in 2000. It is now indisputable that humans are a force of geological proportions, one that is putting ever-increasing pressure on natural resources and ecosystems everywhere on Earth.¹

The dilemmas we face are unavoidable and grow more critical with every passing year. If business as usual were capable of solving them we would not have the poverty, the unequal distribution of wealth, the increased conflict and use of violence for political purposes, the environmental destruction, and the unsustainable patterns of production and consumption that surround us today.

In the last 20 years, each of these dilemmas has been dramatically worsened by the realities of climate change. We are proceeding headlong into a future shaped by the discharge of our wastes into our atmosphere and our oceans.

The decades ahead present us with a crucible of moral choices.

We are the first generation in human history that has had the opportunity to achieve sustainable and just societies. We have the knowledge, the technology, and the wealth to succeed. Moreover, for half a century, we have known that the choices we make will have serious consequences for the world of the future and for our children. It is clear that most often we have lacked the courage and the will to make the morally right choices, to do what we know is necessary.

Each and every one of us is responsible for the consequences of our choices. Each day that passes without our finding the courage to make the decisions we know are necessary adds to the unconscionable burden we bequeath to our children and grandchildren. The difficulty of the decisions we leave to them will far exceed the difficulty of the decisions we face today.

Examples of faith-based environmental teachings and traditions in the first part of this book stand in direct contradiction to the human choices that have written our crisis across the face of the planet. The reality that results from our refusal or inability to act is clear in its outline, and even in much of its detail; an overview of the impact of our actions on the natural world is introduced in the second half of the book.

Today the voices of our children call out to us, challenging our cowardice and greed as they consider their legacy of emptiness, poverty, and violence



Courtesy of Nathaniel Hales.

— but an even more dire fate awaits our grandchildren. We leave them a world that our parents would not recognize, bereft of much of the beauty, complexity, and richness we have squandered. Our actions are poised to break the bond between grandparents and grandchildren; we will not recognize the world in which we condemn them to live, and they will be strangers to the beauty and bounty of the world our parents left to us.

The context in which we will make our choices must include the full panoply of faith, science, and societal institutions. If these institutions are to become agents of sustainability, they will need to be enabled by knowledge and inspired by faith.

*David Hales
Chair, Climate Action
Parliament of the World's Religions*

THE SACRED UNIVERSE

“A recovery of the sublime meaning of the universe could lead both to a greater intimacy of the human with the manifestation of the divine in the natural world and to a greater intimacy of the different religions among themselves. Restoration of the sense of the natural world as divine manifestation has a special urgency because of the devastation that we are presently causing to the natural world... Only the religious forces of the world with their sense of the sacred can evoke the psychic energies needed to transform a declining Cenozoic Era into the emerging Ecozoic Era... To initiate and guide this next creative moment of the great story of the Earth is the Great Work of the religions of the world as we move on into the future.”

—Thomas Berry,
The Sacred Universe, pp. 80-87.

THE EARTH CHARTER

The mission of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Parliament of the World's Religions align with the principles and goals articulated in The Earth Charter (<https://earthcharter.org/>), an international declaration of fundamental values and ethical framework for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century. The Charter was launched in June 2000 by an independent international entity in a ceremony at the Peace Palace in The Hague. It is the product of a ten year, worldwide, cross-cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values, and is the most inclusive and participatory process ever associated with an international declaration. The Charter recognizes that the goals of ecological protection, the eradication of poverty, equitable economic development, respect for human rights, democracy, and peace are interdependent and indivisible. It provides an inclusive, integrated ethical framework to guide the transition to a sustainable future, and has been endorsed by over 6,000 organizations, including many governments and international organizations.

The Charter contains four basic principles, each of which includes a specific set of goals, commitments, and actions:

I. RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE

1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.
2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.
3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.
4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

II. ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.
6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.
7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community wellbeing.
8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.
10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.
11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.
12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual wellbeing, with special attention to the rights of Indigenous Peoples and minorities.

IV. DEMOCRACY, NONVIOLENCE, AND PEACE

13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.
14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.
15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.
16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.

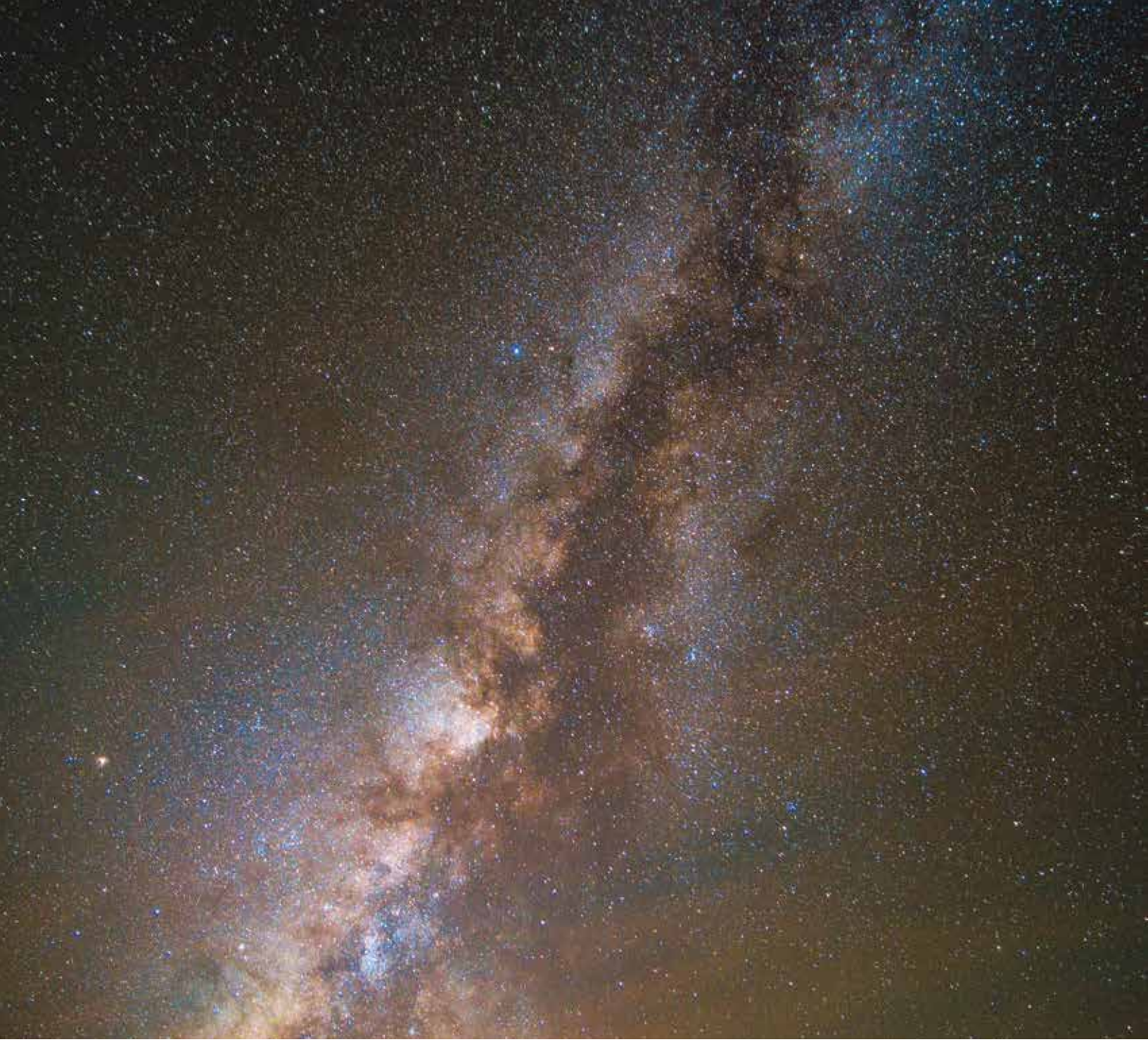
The Charter asks that human beings “imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally”; preserve cultural diversity; and work collaboratively in the search for truth and wisdom. It calls on the arts, sciences, religions, educational institutions, media, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and governments to offer creative leadership, and asks the nations of the world to fulfill their obligations under existing international agreements and support implementation of Earth Charter principles.

“Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.”

YALE FORUM ON RELIGION AND ECOLOGY

The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE), (<https://fore.yale.edu>) is an international multi-religious project contributing to the field of religion and ecology and is an engaged moral force of religious environmentalism. Its mission is to inform and inspire people to preserve, protect, and restore the Earth community. The religions of the world transmit ecological and justice perspectives in their scriptures, rituals, and contemplative practices, as well as in their moral and ethical commitments. FORE identifies those perspectives in order to share comprehensive and collaborative solutions to global environmental crises, cultivating dialogue among religious/spiritual communities in partnership with scientists and policy makers. Its website provides a clearinghouse for news, information, and resources about religion and ecology, highlighting over 300 engaged projects.

FORE works to nurture a flourishing Earth community, where religious and spiritual traditions join together for the shared wellbeing of ecosystems, life forms, and people in our common planetary home. Founded by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim at the United Nations in 1998 and based at Yale University since 2006, FORE plays a pivotal part in the study of religion and ecology and has had an instrumental role in making the publication of this book possible.



Faith

During The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) International's 25th anniversary celebration in Assisi, Italy in September 1986, leaders of five of the world's religions — Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism — presented statements about their traditions' understanding of nature and their religion's values concerning conservation and the environment. Known as the Assisi Declarations, those five statements are regarded as a landmark in religious environmental ethics. WWF also launched the Network on Conservation and Religion at that time, leading to the formation of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). The Bahá'í Faith, Confucianism, Daoism, the Jain Religion, the Sikh Religion, Shinto, and Zoroastrianism joined ARC and created statements about their faith's relation to nature, and the Assisi Declarations themselves expanded to include additional detail. Each of the faith traditions' teachings in the following pages begins with brief excerpts from the five Assisi Declarations, from the statements by the seven religions that joined the ARC network, and from a declaration by the Alliance of Mother Nature's Guardians, a group of Indigenous leaders and activists from around the world, at their second assembly in 2017.

INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS

There are more than 370 million Indigenous Peoples living in 70 countries on six continents, with unique cultures distinct from the dominant societies in which they live and long-standing connections to particular ancestral lands. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues states that "...the most fruitful approach is to identify, rather than define, indigenous peoples. This is based on the fundamental criterion of self-identification as underlined in a number of human rights documents." Despite their diversity, the traditions of Indigenous Peoples share several common themes, including recognition of the community of all life, in which humans are just one member; respect for nature and other-than-human forms of life; the imperative of harmony with nature; and living in accord with original instructions given by spiritual beings and the Creator.

ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam agree that nature is God's creation. God has made the universe and the order of the natural world, and has provided for all God's creatures. These faiths press us to recognize that we are one small part of a complex, interdependent creation. And yet God has given humans a special responsibility to take care of and protect creation, as good stewards or guardians. All beings in creation have value in God's eyes and should be treated with respect.

INDIC RELIGIONS

Religious traditions originating in India are Hinduism, the Jain Religion, Buddhism, and the Sikh Religion. While their worldviews differ, they share certain basic concepts, including belief in many births, or "reincarnation," in which life can take different forms, creating continuity between human life and other living things. Rebirth is determined in part by one's karma, which may be ethically good, bad, or neutral. The word karma means "action," and implies that every action has a result, an important idea for ecological ethics. Indic traditions affirm that there is a right order of the universe and of human society, often called Dharma, a term of central importance in Indian civilization. Indicating universal moral norms, Dharma has many possible translations, including "law," "duty," and "righteousness." Indic religions also share systems of spiritual discipline and contemplative practice known cross-traditionally as Yoga or "union," aiming at oneness with a sacred reality.

EAST ASIAN RELIGIONS

The religions originating in East Asia are Confucianism, Daoism, and Shinto. Chinese civilization is at least 5,000 years old and the roots of Confucianism and Daoism are very ancient. They share a worldview in which the universe is seen as a living organic whole, united by matter-energy (*qi* or *ch'i*). This vital force is the basis for dynamic change and creativity. The great triad of Heaven, Earth, and Humans forms the unity of the universe. Within this triad, humans cultivate virtue, following the Way of the Sages. Confucian teachings on humaneness and filial piety contribute to social and political harmony. Daoist teachings contribute to individual health and wellbeing. In Japan, the indigenous tradition of Shinto centers on the community of deities (*kami*) in the natural and human worlds. These deities are to be respected so that the natural world, infused with divinity and purity, will continue to sustain all life.

Note: The pages that follow are guided by the concept that a religion has three aspects: a worldview or "cosmovision"; a value system, or ethics; and a set of practices or "way of life" that attune the individual and the community to that worldview. A religious worldview (as distinct from a secular one) references a larger reality sometimes called the Sacred.

We have consulted with community members from each religious tradition on the content of individual sections. We recognize that not all may agree on how a given religion should be named, and have tried to be respectful of different points of view.

We have made slight revisions in a few places in wording to accommodate gender-inclusive language.

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