

Editor's Note

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The Journal of Liberal Religion, from its founding in 1939 to its current incarnation, exists to contribute to the intellectual development and renewal of religious liberalism. It is to this task that Professor John Ronald Engel has devoted the better part of the last thirty-five years through his teaching, mentoring, writing, and lecturing. The editors of the JLR are pleased to offer this Spring 2000 issue under the title, "Ecology, Democracy, and Religion: Essays in Honor of J. Ronald Engel." In this issue, we pay tribute to the work of Professor Engel on the occasion of his transition from teaching faculty member to research professor at Meadville Lombard Theological School. Two of the essays address The Earth Charter, a major ecumenical and interdisciplinary effort to articulate a global ethic for the earth community, which has been one of Professor Engel's primary commitments over the last decade. All of these essays touch on themes that have been the focus of his professional life.

Speaking personally, it is a great privilege for me to assist in bringing this issue to publication. Ron and I met a little over five years ago when I became a student at Meadville Lombard and began as Ron's research assistant. Over the last years, he has been a mentor and a friend, an intellectual catalyst and a pastoral advisor. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to have worked with Ron know his personal warmth, his passion for ideas, and his notorious laugh. More than a few of us have had our lives shifted in unexpected directions because of his generous spirit.

Some time ago, as I was casting about attempting to discern my professional path, Ron stepped in and provided a crucial signpost. I had written a paper for him on some theological topic of which I was reasonably proud; Ron returned the paper with the cryptic scribble: "Ken, come talk to me. I think I know what your calling is!" We talked and he announced, "You, my young friend, should become a theologian." Coming from Ron, this pronouncement was monumental. Though I initially resisted his suggestion, his words have shaped my aspirations. For this I am grateful.

Ron embodies the best of the modern religious scholar. His passion for ideas is tempered only by his concern for the individuals and communities that incarnate those ideas. His scholarship is rigorous and redemptive. There is no easy distinction between Ron's life and his work: Ron and Joan's home is situated in the Indiana Dunes, the locale of his first book; his religious communion is made up of members of the international environmental movement and the Unitarian Universalist community; and his worshipping takes place both on the shores of Lake Michigan and in thoughtful debate with colleagues. Ron once told me that

his idea of heaven is thoughtful, engaged theological conversation that goes on forever.

We thus pay tribute to Professor Engel and attempt to carry forward the conversation for which he has labored. It has been a joy for me to come to know Ron over these last years, to experience his inexorable enthusiasm, his warmth, his intelligence, and his generosity. In this spirit we offer this collection of essays in Ron's honor, so that the reader too may know something of this man who has meant so much to so many.

Finally, in addition to these essays on ecology, ethics, and religion, we have added several features to this second online issue of the JLR. We have included two significant essays which are unrelated to the issue's theme under the heading, "Featured Articles." We have also incorporated a section entitled, "Conversations." This section extends a thread from the previous issue through a response by Susann Pangerl to Paul Rasor's "The Self in Contemporary Liberal Religion," along with Dr. Rasor's reply. Also included are several letters to the editors which comment on articles from the first issue. Finally, from this issue on, all previous issues may be found in the JLR's online archives.

We look forward to hearing from you.