

★ **The Great Conversation: Nature and the Care of the Soul****Belden C. Lane**

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Contemplating the depth of the soul by considering elements of nature, theology professor Belden Lane begins his enthralling *The Great Conversation* by explaining his twenty-year love affair with “Grandfather,” a hundred-year-old cottonwood tree that has acted as Lane’s “leafy spiritual guide.” This unusual, intimate embrace of one of the earth’s living things is symbolic of the relationship Lane strives to have with all of nature.

The book is divided into sections that represent the classical elements of nature, connected to life stages. Within each of these sections, chapters address various components of the elements: birds under air, and rivers and canyons under water. This organization makes a book that is otherwise steeped in lyrical, expressive prose also cohesive.

Lane encourages his readership to see the world through a spiritual lens, viewing birds as “mediators between heaven and earth, often appearing in folklore as the messengers of the gods.” About rivers and canyons, he muses, “As we ponder the waters that engulf our individual lives, we may understand how interior canyons have been formed there as well. Recognizing what we’ve had to leave behind—and what still needs to go.”

The text imparts knowledge via rich stories, some of them biblical, and references influential lessons from spiritual leaders of diverse backgrounds: Roman Catholic sisters and brothers, a rabbi, a Taoist philosopher, a Sufi mystic, Eastern Orthodox writers, and a Greek novelist. This unusual amalgam of perspectives enriches the work.

Belden Lane closes his magical book with a plea that we learn to listen to a planet under stress. This may be the most vital message of *The Great Conversation*.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (May/June 2019)

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