Earth Spirituality is a Many Splendored Thing!
J. Ronald Engel

My thesis, stated as simply and succinctly as I can, is this: Human beings have evolved a plurality of ways of engaging spirit, nature, and one another so as to enable their mutual flourishing; we need to be critically faithful to each of these ways, separately, and in interplay with each other, if we are to set our species on a just, sustainable, and spiritually fulfilling path of planetary evolution. This is the promise of the marriage of the ecological world view and the democratic ideal in our epoch.

Taken together, we might call this plurality the path of "earth spirituality." Then earth spirituality is a many splendored thing! Or as Joseph Sittler, whose authority is properly evoked in these matters, once said: "Grace comes in colors."

Let me briefly describe eight paradigmatic expressions of the plurality I have in mind. There is nothing definitive about this list; the various entries merge with one another; the descriptions are crude at best, and no doubt incomplete. The only warrant I can give for these characterizations is that they come out of my experience and reading. Hopefully, as we proceed, the reasons for assembling this particular list, and what each of its entries tries to represent, will become clearer.

Wilderness encounter: the experience of radical psychological and moral transformation through an encounter with a transcendent truth or Other in a wild, often hostile environment, placing one outside social custom, and leading to a deep and abiding identification with the evolution of all existence, a new capacity for moral self-government, and a prophetic commitment to social justice and the flourishing of life "natural, wild, and free"

Bioregional participation: the experience of belonging to an interdependent, mutually constraining natural community or ecosystem, inclusive of human society, and coterminous with one or more polity in which one holds citizenship, leading to a sense of moral and political obligation to cooperate in maintaining the ecological integrity and species diversity of the commons, and keeping its inclusive covenants

Embracing the body: an intimate awareness of the generative powers of our mortal bodily being, our capacity to give birth and be reborn throughout the cycles of life, leading to solidarity with all other bodies, a concern for organic well being and healing, and a determination that the lives of the past shall find immortality in the healthy, thriving bodies of the future

Respect for the rights of individual beings: the experience of the unique individuality and intrinsic value of other beings who are "subjects of a life," human and non-human, leading to a respect for their equal right to exist and to be free to pursue a life of their own, and efforts to legally institutionalize such rights, with special concern for the equal rights of the oppressed

Compassion for the sufferings of life: the experience of sympathy for the ways in which humans and other sentient beings can be violated and feel pain, leading to a benevolent concern to remove unnecessary suffering in our treatment of persons and animals, with special concern for the suffering of the weak, the abandoned, and the excluded

Tending the garden: making a home and a livelihood through the cultivation of plants and animals and the practice of the domestic virtues, including sowing the soil and reaping the harvest, keeping a hearth, preparing and sharing nourishing food, and nurturing a marriage and family, leading to fidelity to place and local community, and perseverance in the ordinary, life-sustaining tasks of human dwelling

Stewardship: the experience of being treated fairly, and having one's basic needs met, in spite of scarce resources, leading one to assume responsibility for membership in a moral community that seeks the equitable, efficient, and sustainable use of the wealth of the community, including the management of its natural resources, for the most persons over the longest time

Artistic co-creation: the exercise of the human capacity for co-creativity through realizing the potentialities of nature for new forms of perfection, and the potentialities of human beings for self-realization through esthetic sensitivity and skill in the making of works of art, leading to efforts to make all human action and production, technical skill, and kinds of work more esthetically fulfilling for humans and the environment

The spirit is manifest in different ways in each of these forms of engagement. In the first, what I call wilderness encounter, it is radically dialectical, presenting a powerful negation of the self followed by an even more powerful affirmation through an identification with the ultimate source and purpose of existence. In the second, bioregional participation, it is manifest in the holistic beauty and integrity of interdependent community; in the third, embracing the body, the spirit is present in the blessedness of incarnate being; in the fourth, respect for the rights of individual beings, as the presence of Thou in every other; in the fifth, compassion for the sufferings of life, the spirit is expressed in the power of selfless love and co-suffering; in the sixth, tending the garden, the spirit is sustaining faithful care; in the seventh, stewardship, the spirit empowers us to take responsibility for what is not our own and a future we will never see; and finally, in the eighth, the exercise of artistic creation, spirit is manifest as a self-transcending and self-realizing creativity that grasps us whenever we set our hands to make something new.

I

I cannot tell you when I first began to think about this subject, but I do know it has been germinating for a long time. Its roots are in the sacred geography of my childhood in a suburb on the northern edge of Baltimore where I first discovered the joys and pains of the kinds of engagement we are discussing here-precious, intimate experiences and memories which have directed my life ever since. I must also say that I can never remember a time when I did not feel these ways of being in the world were under threat, so it is no exaggeration to say that the pattern of my life and thought were early set.

The thesis first began to take conscious shape in the 1960s when Neil Shadle and I and our families engaged in a ministry-at-large in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago-a very different place than what it is today. We talked about the "inner city" as a "wilderness," a wilderness that carried the possibilities of earthly renewal. By this we meant-at least in part-that in the traditional cultures of the people who made up our neighborhood, the remnant European ethnic communities of Germans and Italians (among others), the rural cultures of southern African Americans and Appalachian whites, the recently arrived Latinos, there lingered rich expressions of these basic forms of engagement between human beings, nature and spirit. Yet these practices had little social or ecological support in urban industrial Chicago, and what remained was quickly being destroyed, a process considerably accelerated in our neighborhood by what was euphemistically called "urban renewal." Real earthly renewal as we saw it was the hope that these spiritual cultures might be nurtured back to health and become the substance of a transformed metropolitan regional community. And if it could happen here, in this place, which of all places denied them, then it could happen everywhere!

Each one of the eight forms of engagement that we are considering tonight was alive there, thirty years ago, casting its radiance over our lives. It meant everything to us, for example, that we personally lived as members of this neighborhood, citizens of this little urban bioregion, that we took this whole community as our parish, and called our community organization, the "Neighborhood Commons." Even in this biologically impoverished landscape, the natural ecosystem was important to us, and I vividly recall the day we took a group of young people for a canoe trip along the north branch of the Chicago River to help get a better sense of our turf. I also recall the day Joan and I discovered a neighbor from Eastern Europe picking the grape leaves off the vine in our yard, the roosters that used to crow in the morning, the food co-op we sponsored, and the great community potlucks we shared. How personally redemptive it was for me to discover that these strangers loved gardens, and a trip out of the city, as much as I did! (Never since that time have I had tolerance for the claim that "the environment" is only a "white" person's or elitist issue). Our ministry was about embracing bodies, especially the bodies of children, and in the parlance of the civil rights movement, putting our bodies "on the line." I could go on at some length about the resurgence of the "community arts" in our neighborhood, and our efforts at stewardship and sustainable co-creativity through a community development corporation that rehabilitated and built low-income housing and which continues to prosper to this day.

The thesis became quite explicit in the course of my research on the century-long struggle for the Indiana Dunes. In the writing of Sacred Sands1 I became aware that what is at stake here is not mere nostalgia, but the kind of primary motivating experiences, memories, images, hopes, that can empower persons to stand up to some of the most powerful economic, technological, and political forces in the modern world. Equally important, I began to get some sense of how these primary paradigms join with one another to form not only the sacred geographies of each of us personally, but the sacred geographies of particular cultural and natural landscapes, and in this way are shared by whole communities of people.

The Dunes landscape is an exemplary ecosystem or bioregion (in fact, one of the chief places in the world that gave birth to the idea of an "ecosystem" through the work of the pioneering ecologists at the University of Chicago); it was and is one of the last remnants of "wilderness" in the Chicago region (many are the persons who have had their lives changed by "moments of truth" experienced on the Lake Michigan dunes shore—Dorothy Day for one); it is bordered on the south by small family farms, including one that became a locus classicus of what it means spiritually to "tend the garden"—portrayed by Edwin Way Teale in his book Dune Boy;2 it is perceived as itself a "work of art" and the perfect place for the work of painters, dancers, musicians, and landscape architects; it is a refuge for the homeless, human and non-human; it is a source of bodily renewal for thousands, including countless migratory birds; it is a national memorial to a former Illinois Senator, Paul Douglas, who believed that the "right to life" included the right of every citizen to a healthy environment, and who began his life-long career on behalf of social justice when as a kid he clubbed a porcupine and read in its eyes the plea: "I have the right to live also." A remnant of the Dunes was saved only because of all these meanings working together in the interplay between public and private imaginations and this particular physical landscape.

It was also while doing the Dunes research that I became aware of the intimate connection between environmental protection and social justice, not just as an abstract ideal, or a kind of social analysis, but in their actual practice. The Dunes scientists who came up with the idea of dynamic evolving ecosystems were also working in the settlement houses in Chicago trying to create a shared sense of bioregional citizenship across the whole Chicago area, from Waukegan to Michigan City. Robert Gottlieb has since chronicled in Forcing the Spring3 how Chicago—especially Chicago's women at Hull House—gave birth to a major strand in the history of the American environmental movement that has kept justice and the environment together. But more than this: it became evident to me in the course of my research that each of the primary forms of engagement we are discussing involves a distinct way of treating ourselves, each other, and the environment, and therefore is a distinctive expression of personal, social, and environmental ethics. Each is intrinsically a matter of eco-justice, in the fullest sense of the word. But the moral content of that term varies from one kind of engagement to the other. The pastoral traditions promote an ethics of virtue; the artistic paradigm tends to be teleological, for both humans and the materials at hand; the land ethic leans strongly toward an ethics of the common good; the practice of respect for one's life companions tends to be deontological. Here is ethical pluralism in technicolor! And it leapt out at me from the pages of diaries and scientific treatises and novels and histories recording the fleeting experiences of several generations of ordinary people whose primary ambition was simply to "live well" in this place under the conditions life given to them.

Immediately after my work on the Dunes I attached myself to UNESCO to research "the symbolic and ethical meaning" of their international system of biosphere reserves. This took me to different parts of the world where environmental social issues were especially critical, and equally important, introduced me to a group of people who were at the forefront of international efforts to implement "sustainable development." What I discovered was that biosphere reserves are in effect attempts to preserve and advance several of these paradigmatic practices in widely diverse cultural and environmental settings, and to do so as a coordinated unit. Thus the ideal biosphere reserve is an integral bioregion that includes a core wilderness area large enough to permit evolutionary processes to continue largely unaffected by the influence of human activity; surrounding areas that maintain traditional cultural and land-use practices, hunting and gathering, agriculture and livestock raising, craft production and appropriate forms of resource extraction, that have proven sustainable in this ecosystem; and a buffer area where experiments are conducted in new kinds of economic and technological development that might enhance the viability of the bioregion as a whole.

On the one hand, this research was stimulating for my thesis. It meant that these basic forms of engagement were by no means limited to American, or even Western, cultures. They constituted potentially a common language of human engagement that could cut across cultural and religious lines. The kaya forests on the eastern coast of Kenya, like Mt. Kenya itself, served the same kind of function in the lives of the indigenous peoples of the region as the dunes mountains on the shores on the Lake Michigan served for us, as different as their associated myths and symbols may be. In each case they were places of radical personal, social and ecological renewal because they preserved a space apart from human will and purpose, a world still centered on ultimate beginnings and endings, where life went on on its own terms, and new beginnings and new covenants were always possible. No wonder Jomo Kenyatta and his rebel army kept constant contact with Mt. Kenya in their war with Britain: it was the greatest spiritual/social/physical shrine of native independence available to them. Today these places are invaluable sanctuaries of biological diversity.

On the other hand, this work was frustrating, and it continues to be frustrating as I try to maintain a place for ethical and religious discourse in the international environmental movement. Modern scientific modes of thought and utilitarian resource conservation practices are so dominant, and the schizophrenia between the "two cultures" so deep, that it is almost impossible to get such value-laden cultural practices talked about on their own terms. Almost everyone I meet who works on projects like the biosphere reserves personally holds such values: it is what keeps them going. But they do not have permission from their institutional and disciplinary cultures to admit to this.

II

Before proceeding to a fuller statement of my general thesis, including what I see as the overarching religious significance of these plural ways of being in the world, and why I believe the marriage of the ecological world view and democratic ideal alone can provide the integration they require in our epoch, let us briefly address two methodological issues that immediately present themselves.

First, what precisely are we talking about when we speak of a plurality of ways that humans engage one another, nature and spirit?

Generally speaking, the position I am advancing shares the general direction in ethics, represented by figures such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum, and Charles Taylor, which is seeking to challenge the mainstream form of moral philosophy, which shuns any articulation of goods, or any strong claims about the quality of life. In fact, this mainstream tradition does not eschew all goods, but rather privileges a certain narrow range of them: the human-centered goods of freedom, benevolence, and universal human rights. These are terribly important goods, but by no means all that is involved in the whole human good. This new direction is in certain respects a revival of an Aristotelian moral conception of human well-being, according to which the goods of an individual human life are to be had in developing the individual?s characteristically human capacities, for example, friendship, or the appreciation of beauty, and which become more pronounced the more excellent the practices which embody them.

So far there has been only limited interest among environmental or social ethicists to expand the concept of human well-being to include practices that engage the natural environment as well as oneself and other people.4 I would hold, however, that this ought to be one of the central ethical tasks of our time.

I have experimented with a variety of ways of speaking about this subject. In this paper, under the influence of Albert Borgmann's work in Technology and Contemporary Life,5 I find myself using "forms of engagement." Borgmann comes close to putting his finger on what I am trying to talk about. Central to his analysis is what he calls "focal things and practices" (e.g., playing a violin) that so directly engage our energies and attention that they have the power to "center and illuminate our lives." Other examples of focal things and practices are preparing and sharing a good meal, running, cutting wood, and building and enjoying the warmth of a good fire. Compared to Borgmann's focal things and practices, however, my forms of engagement are more complex; they involve constellations of focal things and practices, comprehensive relational contexts within which focal things and practices appear and from which they derive their larger importance.

We may also usefully speak about these various forms of human engagement with spirit and nature in terms of the "traditions" they embody: each is borne by a particular set of institutions; the practitioners of each refer to classic exemplars, texts, events, to establish the norms of their practice; each is associated with a particular set of sacred places and images.6 How could we in the West grasp what the "wilderness engagement" means without encounters like those of Hagar with the Angel; or St. Francis at La Verna; or John Muir in the Sierras? Rachel Carson and Aldo Leopold gave us classic texts for the emergent bioregional consciousness.7 The body of the Goddess; the body of Christ. Henry Salt?s idea in the 1890s of a "Great Republic" that embraces the rights of animals as well as people prepared the way for Tom Regan?s hard-hitting philosophical case for animal rights a century later,8 just as William Wilberforce?s campaigns in the 1830s against human slavery and cruelty to animals are the historical wellsprings for Peter Singer?s carefully reasoned arguments for euthanasia and animal welfare.9 We might expect Laurel Robertson of Laurel's Kitchen to ignore the patriarchal American agrarian tradition altogether, but we are told that "the mere mention of Thomas Jefferson would bring on a warm flush and a ten-minute disquisition."10 We know what stewardship means because of the conservation plan Joseph invented while serving as overseer in the household of Potiphar. We have a sense of what artistic co-creation means because of what Michelangelo said about how the sculptor reveals the forms inherent in marble.

Other terms and concepts suggest themselves as well: "life-worlds" (Habermas), "forms of ecological consciousness," "ideal types" (Weber), "paths of life." In my courses in environmental ethics I use the terminology of "ethical paradigms"-by which I mean exemplary patterns of human behavior and valuing that make strong normative claims to organize and direct the course of human environmental activity. In the discussion that follows I will use several of these terms interchangeably.

I have long admired the efforts of John Dewey to overcome the dualism of experience and nature. But not until recently have I realized that what I am calling here "forms of engagement" might be what Dewey and his fellow empirical naturalists had most concretely on their minds. In all of Experience and Nature Dewey gives us only one example of what he means by "primary experience":

Experience denotes the planted field, the sowed seeds, the reaped harvests, the changes of night and day, spring and autumn, wet and dry, heat and cold, that are observed, feared, longed for; it also denotes the one who plants and reaps, who works and rejoices, hopes, fears, plans, invokes magic or chemistry to aid him, who is downcast or triumphant. It is double-barreled in that it recognizes in its primary integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in an unanalyzed totality.11

Setting aside for a moment the question of the ontology involved, of one thing we may be certain: my typology of eight kinds of earth spirituality accurately reflects the primary kinds of social, environmental, and spiritual values that inform the history of the environmental movement and its associated philosophical, literary and theological literature.12 Rub hard any one of the environmental texts of our time, even the most conceptually abstract, and one will soon uncover, buried underneath, controlling the language and structure of the argument, one or more (typically several) of these basic kinds of engagement between humanity, nature and spirit. In the philosophical, scientific, and policy-oriented literature, of course, the spiritual dimension is typically left most implicit and undeveloped, but it is there.

A few examples are in order. No doubt my list is overmuch influenced by the particular ways these values have been developed in the western academic literature. Holmes Rolston, who published the first essay in environmental ethics in an academic journal, Ethics, in 1974, draws heavily upon the wilderness experience in his exposition of "values gone wild," as does Arne Naess in his exposition of "Self-realization" in deep ecology.13 Baird Callicott has devoted his career to explicating Aldo Leopold's land ethic14 as has Wendell Berry to the meaning of tending the garden.15 Gibson Winter has given us the fullest theological statement of the co-creative artistic experience.16 I have previously mentioned Tom Regan?s case for animal rights and Peter Singer?s arguments for animal welfare. Although Herman Daly and John Cobb's 500 page For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future,17 is filled with intimidating technical ecological concepts, its argument is driven, first, by the "wild facts," then by a bioregional vision of the world-the biosphere conceived as a "community of communities," into which is folded a strong appeal for the proper understanding of economics as stewardship or oikonomia, topped by a plea on behalf of animal welfare.

All these authors are men. The ecofeminist movement has substantially expanded our understanding of the meaning of each of these kinds of engagement, raised certain ones to prominence, and provided a penetrating social analysis of the connection between domination of nature and domination of women. We therefore need to complement Rolston and Naess with Laura Westra and Val Plumwood;18 Callicott with Freya Matthews;19 Wendell Berry with Vandana Shiva;20 Regan and Singer with Carol Adams and Mary Midgley;21 Winter with Dorothy Soelle;22 Daly and Cobb with Kristen Schrader Frechette and Rosemary Ruether;23 and acknowledge that our new appreciation of the body is almost entirely due to feminist writers such as Susan Griffin and Sallie McFague.24

The second methodological issue arises when we realize that most authors, as most environmental advocates, take a particular understanding of the way human beings engage with one another, the spirit, and the natural environment, whether it be "anthropocentric stewardship," "egocentric deep ecology," or a "theology of the body," and argue its superiority to all others, including its capacity to organize what is worthwhile in all the others on its particular terms. Indeed, the history of the environmental movement and the field of environmental ethics may be largely recounted as a history of battles between advocates of each of these paradigms, from the famous national debate between wilderness advocate John Muir and stewardship advocate Gifford Pinchot over Hetch Hetchy Dam in the early part of the century,25 to the recent ecological holism versus animal rights debate between Baird Callicott and Tom Regan.26 Roderick Nash outraged many environmental ethicists when he published Rights of Nature because it purports to tell the whole history of environmental ethics from a liberal natural rights perspective.27 Paul Shepherd has attacked the agrarian environmental tradition from the standpoint of wilderness;28 and Michael Pollen has attacked the wilderness tradition from the standpoint of the agrarian.29 Of special interest to Unitarian Universalists, philosopher Joel Kovel believes it is the wilderness experience, as portrayed by Herman Melville in Moby Dick, that must take precedence over Emerson's robust artist-centered creation spirituality.30

It is easy to appreciate why the sparks can fly because there are serious tensions and conflicts between these various traditions or paradigms, and difficult choices are often necessary. Moreover, each one of these forms of engagement is powerful enough to generate metaphors that have a wide range of applicability, and therefore claim comprehensive adequacy—indeed, each hast the potential to generate its own distinctive anthropology and cosmology!

Like many others, I have moved increasingly toward a pluralist approach, recognizing the radical pluralism inherent in both nature and human experience, and emphasizing the greater well-being that is possible for humans and the rest of life if a variety of kinds of engagement are recognized and encouraged. There are many ways in which each of these paradigms not only can benefit from the others, but needs the others to offset its inherent limitations. Moreover, I assume we need a healthy plurality of approaches in order to adequately address the complex issues involved in our manifold interactions with the rest of nature. No one paradigm is all-sufficient.

But how to keep these different balls in the air is not easy. I do believe that a coordinating principle, or center, or supreme evaluative principle, is required. If it comes from among the forms of engagement themselves, how so, and if not, where does it come from? We will return to this issue in Part IV below.

III

What I am inviting us to consider here is much more important than these methodological questions, however. My argument is that these are basic ways of life that have evolved over millennia, and while they come to us with all kinds of limitations and distortions that cry out for criticism and reform, they yet carry whatever wisdom our species has painstakingly achieved for how to co-adapt its distinctive form of species existence with the natural evolution of the planet, while at the same time sustaining our most enduring intimations of a creative, sustaining, and redemptive spirit acting in consort with human and other natural energies.

It is my contention that these eight different kinds of engagement are representative of our most trustworthy responses to the central religious question of human life: how are we to live under the conditions of life as they are given to us here and now on this planet? How we answer that question, of course, has powerful implications for how we approach our ethical treatment of one another and the environment. But the question itself is bigger than ethics; it is our fundamental response to the agony and ecstasy of earthly existence. I know of no better description of our earthly condition that that of Charles Morris at the beginning of his book Paths of Life:

> The agony of humanity is inherent in life and inescapable. Human beings appear and live in a world vaster and more powerful than themselves . . . Ever struggling to reach their goals, achievements tempered by frustration and defeat; confused by the clash of their own assertiveness with the tug of detachment and the outreachings of sympathy and love; tolerated for a time by forces which support their strivings; invaded by processes which slowly break their delicate and precarious equilibrium; visited by intense joys and tragic pains, the thrust of life pushing them forward into the jaws of death: such is the human situation . . . the vast and elemental features of human life.31

While it is outrageous to think that we could ever address the fundamental question of human purpose and meaning apart from our relations to the rest of nature and our human kin, or to think that we might gain a uniquely personal, human, or confessional salvation apart from the salvation of the rest of creation, it is not difficult to understand why persons have been tempted to do precisely that, and why salvation continues to bear other-worldly meanings to so many people. To declare "creation good"—as, in different senses of "good," each of these fundamental ways of engagement does so declare—and ourselves, like all things of earth, fully in and of it, not "sojourners" on our way to another place, and to do this in face of the certainty of suffering and death, for oneself and one's loved ones, in the face of the inevitable transiency of our most cherished achievements, in the face of all the savagery and predation humans and other creatures daily practice upon one another (not to mention the earth-shattering holocausts of human history) is an almost impossible act of acceptance and this-worldly transcendence. It is no wonder that we seem "possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given" as Hannah Arendt observed in The Human Condition, and that in 1957 Sputnik was widely greeted as the first "step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth."32 Even Henry Beston with his deep love of Cape Cod must speak of animals as "caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendor and travail of the earth."33

Yet millions of persons do it every day, and they do it in large part, I hold, because they continue to experience, even if it is only the memory or the hope of the experience, one or more of these kinds of ways of being in the world, bearing as they do all we have yet learned about how to engage the creative, sustaining, and redemptive powers of existence. (We might add at this point: if many of us are open to "earth spirituality" today, it is in no small measure due to the incredible success of the last activity on our list, in the form homo faber, to ameliorate many of our earthly hardships, even if, in the process, it has created massive new ones).

Let me now round out this exposition of my thesis. I am suggesting that it is precisely this rich plurality of ways of engaging our world that is most at stake in the contemporary environmental and social crisis, and in all our contemporary discussions of the relations of spirit, ethics, and nature. On the one hand, these are the very things that are being lost under the onslaught of the juggernaut of megatechnology and the gospel of transcendence through economic and reproductive growth. Ironically, the very industrial and commercial processes that are crowding them out are also drawing their strength from them because these forms of engagement constitute the "stuff" of commodification and domination—whether commodified things or commodified experiences. We are all too familiar with the packaging and colonizing of wilderness areas, bioregional identities, human, animal, and vegetable bodies, homes and gardens, public trusts, and the arts, and all too aware of the tight connection between packaging and colonizing wherever they occur on the planet, which increasingly, is everywhere.

On the other hand, these are the very losses that the most prescient of our poets and reformers and wise women and men have deplored since the beginnings of recorded history, and most especially since the arrival of the "modern age?—it is what drives them to remember, to record, to admonish us to change our ways, as when Richard Wilbur, in his poem "Advice to a Prophet," asks us "whether there shall be lofty or longstanding, when the bronze annals of the oak tree close."34 But not only our prophets. These losses fuel many of the popular resistance movements of our time, as well as much of our current religious and ethnic unrest. These losses have these consequences because they are triple losses: they are losses of our distinctive ways of being wisely and justly and lovingly human; they are losses of the diversity and integrity and splendor of the natural world; and they lead to the "absence," in Jerry Mander's words, "of the sacred."35

We all feel these losses, I believe, even if we are often too embarrassed or inarticulate to say so, and spend most of our energies at cross-purposes with ourselves perpetuating the very processes that destroy the things we love. I believe most people truly yearn to participate in these paths of earthly salvation, and many are eager to find ways to embody them more richly, more justly, than the conditions of the past have allowed. In fact, I believe if the truth be told they want desperately to engage in them, so desperately they are willing to endure their inherited limitations, to pay dearly for their imitations, and to believe the impossible, that somehow we will find a real tree of life in the Eden of another planet or another "world."

Our work is cut out for us. We have no choice but to try to recall our fellow citizens to the things they value in their own right, in Borgmann's terms, to the things we cannot consume but must meet with respect and engagement, and bend the technological, scientific, intellectual, economic, and yes, above all, religious powers of our age into their critical reform and service. In most cases this will require much more than retrieving or restoring past ways of living these diverse life-worlds; it will require a reinvention appropriate to the circumstances under which we now live.

IV

I now want to turn to one of the major challenges this line of thinking must address: how can we link together these various ways of engaging ourselves, one another, nature, and spirit without compromising the robust plurality we affirm? We need a way of considering these paradigmatic practices in relationship to one another if we are to make comparisons and judgments between them, and we need the reinforcing power of all of them if we are to gain a critical collective affirmation of the priority of these engagements in our public and private lives.

The great religious traditions of the past that once provided such connective tissues have dissolved—at least for society at large, and not only for American society, but for most societies world over. The question of whether there can ever again be such integrations is very much on our minds.

For me, at this point in my life, this question is poignant. I have devoted a good deal of time these past few years to a labor of love—preparing with Peter Bakken and Joan Engel a critical annotated bibliography on the literature in the Christian tradition that has spoken to the intersection of ecology, justice, and the Christian faith.36 I have done this as part of an ongoing ecumenical effort by Christian scholars and church leaders to bring the issues of ecology and justice more directly to the fore in theological education and public policy. As a result of this work I can say with all humility that I think I have at last made my peace with the biblical tradition. I rejected Christianity as a young man for the same reasons Lynn White, Jr. wrote his famous essay.37 The Bible seemed to me to be utterly bankrupt when it came to issues of the environment. In spite of the eloquent testimony and gentle prodding of my theological mentor, Jack Hayward, it is only recently that I have come to truly realize now how much of a misreading of the biblical texts and even of the subsequent tradition this was. How could we ever have assumed, given Genesis 9:17, that the covenant was a strictly the-anthropocentric affair? How could we be so blind to the rich ecological meanings of the themes of wilderness, land, tending the garden, stewardship, generativity, compassion for the weak and suffering, and co-creativity that permeate these texts? Clearly, as Ted Hiebert, professor of Old Testament at McCormick Theological School points out, these writings are invaluable if for no other reason they were written by a people in close touch with the land. This is why many of us continue to respond to them, in spite of our considered theological and ethical differences. They are incomparable portrayals of precisely the kind of complex focal practices we are talking about here.

By means of a unified sacred narrative, the biblical texts provide a coordinating center for a plurality of ways of engaging spirit and nature. Although not all persons can accept that narrative as their primary identity or sacred story, this tradition and the institutions that bear it constitute precious arks of the saving wisdom of our species. They need to be able to deliver their precious cargo to dry and safe ground so that it might help renew our common world.

The power of the Christian scriptures and tradition to provide a coordinative and evaluative center for the plurality of ways of engaging spirit, nature, self, and others is evident in the following personae the figure of Jesus as the "Christ" has gathered to itself over the centuries:

Christ crucified and resurrected is our wilderness redemption

Christ is the new covenant

Christ is the body of the world and the bridegroom of the church

Christ is the teacher of righteousness

Christ is the co-suffering servant of the weak and oppressed

Christ is the shepherd

Christ is the gardener

Christ is the New Adam—the perfect steward

Christ is the Logos ("In him all things have been made.") Colossians 1:16

I take the same posture of critical appreciation toward the Hebrew and each of the other great established religious traditions of the planet that I take to the Christian tradition. But in today's pluralistic society we need a more comprehensive center than any one of these religious traditions can provide if we are to free these traditions to share their wisdom with the society at large.

But more than this. In my judgment, the technological way of thinking and being and the economic powers of our time are so overwhelming that no substantial change is likely to occur in the planetary social order unless we can join the wisdom and resources of the historic religious traditions with the liberating energies of our secular cultures—the great hope, and often the great despair, of liberal religion. This means we need a coordinating center that springs in some way from deep inside the centers of all the world's faiths—religious and secular—and brings them into dialogue and practical cooperation with one another around this plurality of ways we can positively engage ourselves, one another, nature, and spirit.

V

I believe that new center is already present in our midst. It is a marriage of two of the most earthly creative, sustaining, and redemptive myths of our epoch: the struggles for democracy and ecological wholeness.

The most important fact about the ecological world view and the democratic ideal in the context of the argument of this paper is that they are already embodied in each of the earth spiritualities described above. This, I would argue, is one of the strongest warrants we can find for both their authority and their viability as the focus of the coordinative center we seek. In addition, they each have proven evaluative power: they can each provide important standards for judging the adequacy of both inherited and newly invented practices and interpretations.

The presence of the ecological world view and the democratic ideal in the descriptions that I gave of the eight paradigms was unintentional. I only realized it upon reflection. I do not think that it is simply an imposition of my own deep seated prejudices—although I freely admit such prejudices exist! Rather, as I shall argue next, these two ideas do in truth inform the most morally and spiritually authentic environmental/social practices of our epoch. They are the deeper mythic continuities that have largely sustained those expressions of earth spirituality that have not yielded to atavistic yearnings in the face of the industrial technological onslaught.

One reason why they are able to serve this coordinative function is they are each highly protean historical traditions. I have wrestled with this protean quality for some time and until recently have seen it as a problem to be overcome. Now I want to advance the notion that the fact that the ecological world view and the democratic ideal can be can found in such widely different, often conflicting, forms is an indication of their power—if one affirms, as I do, that earth spirituality is a many splendored thing! Nor should we forget that the Spirit is the most protean expression of divinity. We have it on good authority, both that of the Gospel of John and the gospel of James Luther Adams, that our faith should be placed in ?the Spirit that may blow where it listeth and . . . create community.?38 I had no trouble enunciating eight quite different kinds of spiritual presence in the eight paradigms.

We are familiar with the widely diverse meanings and practices associated with the idea of democracy, the source of endless debates and struggles in human history. Democracy entered the modern world on three horses: freedom, equality, community, each of which then charged off in a different direction. These three values are spread out throughout the eight paradigms and contribute to the tensions between them; but also to the distinctiveness of each. In fact, each major school of modern democracy, like that of ethics itself, can be seen implicitly in one or more entry on my list and each has no doubt influenced their development over the years. It is suggestive, for example, to see libertarianism in the wilderness encounter and liberal democracy in respect for the rights of all individual beings. Participatory democracy (also called civic republicanism) clearly informs bioregional participation. We have noted how feminist democratic theory and practice inform embracing the body. The social democratic tradition is evident in compassion for the sufferings of life. Populist agrarian democracy is clearly behind the paradigm of tending the garden. Democratic socialism informs stewardship, anarchism artistic creation.

Ecology, or the ecological world view, also has widely diverse meanings associated with it, although we are accustomed to think it means one thing: e.g. the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part. But the "interdependent web" is only one image of ecology, closest to the practice of bioregional participation as I have characterized it. The Greek root of ecology, oikos, meaning household, or habitat, is closer to what I have called tending the garden, or stewardship (oikonomia). There are also differences we typically do not recognize in the study of the science of ecology, with one branch, autecology, focusing on the environmental physiology of individual organisms, and another branch, synecology, focusing on systems ecology. Holmes Rolston calls ecology a ?multiple-paradigm science.?39 The ecological meanings attached to each of the eight ways of earth spirituality are quite different from one another. As one example, "ecological restoration" is practiced as an art form by Bill Jordan, president of the Ecological Restoration Society of America.

These two ideas are also protean in the ease with which they merge with one another. Ultimately, I believe, this is because they share a common spiritual first principle: the ?beloved community? envisaged as the ideal realization of both individuality and relationality, individuality-in-community; or unity-in-diversity. Whitehead's metaphysical conceptualization of the democratic idea is equally applicable to the idea of ecology. "The basis of democracy is the common fact of value experience, as constituting the essential nature of each pulsation of actuality. Everything has some value for itself, for others, and for the whole."40 Certainly in those modes of Western thought loosely associated with, or influenced by, process philosophy and theology, the fit is close. I doubt if Holmes Rolston, whose treatment of ecological ethics revolves around the interplay of intrinsic, instrumental, and systemic values, and who conceives the ecological community as a ?matrix of interconnections between centers?—an ontology he dubs ?communitarian holism?—would find much trouble with substituting ?ecology" for "democracy" in Whitehead's statement above.41 Nor would Baird Callicott who defines the ecological world view in Earth's Insights as follows: "any entity (oneself included) from an ecological point of view, is a node in a matrix of internal relations.?42

The ecological world view has emerged within the development of the evolutionary and ecological sciences in the West. But in the view of Fritjof Capra and Baird Callicott, among others, it has deep resonance?s with non-western religious traditions, especially Native American, Australian aboriginal, and Buddhism.43 Joseph Sittler argues that it has similarly deep resonance?s with the biblical tradition, and with the core of trinitarian thinking: "an ontology of community, communion, ecology."44 My own position is that it is a mistake to equate the ecological world view with the evolutionary and ecological sciences. Rather, like the democratic ideal, it is the cumulative result of a long and patient winnowing of the experiences and reflections of persons working in many fields and cultural and physical settings, not only physicists and biologists, but field naturalists, poets, and metaphysicians. It should come as no surprise that the first modern "ecologist" according to environmental historian Donald Worster, was Gilbert White, a parson in Selbourne, England.45

David Held calls democracy the "metanarrative of our age."46 It also has an obvious western lineage: the civic and philosophical movements that emerged out of ancient Greece and the revolutions of the 18th century. But as Nelson Mandela argues in his autobiography about the practices of "pure democracy" in native African traditions,47 as James Luther Adams argues about the sources of democracy in the biblical prophetic tradition,48 as Gerry Mander argues about the sources of democracy in Native American traditions,49 and as Dalai Lama talks about the inherent democratic meanings of Buddhism, democracy is a much more global reality.50 The democratic ideal comes closest in Borgmann's view to providing the coordinative center we need to make a "social union" between the variety of "focal practices and things"—what he calls it "a republic of focal concerns."51 Conversely, the fact that the paradigmatic practices we are considering are plural and finite means that they inherently foster a democratic social union. Because no one person can realize with excellence more than one or a few of the many ways of earth spirituality, we depend upon each other to see and understand the potential of all of them—collectively, the whole—for fulfillment.

It is most crucial for our purposes here that these ideas are found widely together than that they have wide currency separately. There are interpretations of democracy that do not have anything to do with ecology or the environment, or are markedly anti-environmental; as there are interpretations of the ecological world view that are non- or anti-democratic. This says something about the profound dualism between culture and nature in our dominant culture. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that some integrative interpretation of the ecological world view and the democratic ideal is widely accepted by persons involved in progressive environmental and justice movements today. They appear together in just about every effort at grass-roots community-based sustainable development that is being pursued in just about every part of the world. They are also the two primary informing ideas in most recent efforts to arrive at a consensus regarding a global environmental ethic. The current Earth Charter initiative is a good example. In the words of Ian Evison, this puts us on the "side of history" rather than completely against it, as "environmentalism" is so often perceived to be.

Equally telling, in large measure these two ideas have already been adopted by the liberal or progressive wings of each of the world's religious faiths. In fact, a good case can be made that it was under pressure of these ideas that persons have been led to retrieve the positive environmental and justice meanings in the foundational texts and traditions of the world faiths in recent years. It is no accident that Lynn White, who precipitated this project of religious retrieval and reconstruction, presents St. Francis as the patron saint of ecology because he articulated a vision of a "democracy of creation." It is difficult to find an author in our critical bibliography of over 500 books and essays on Ecology, Justice, and Christian Faith who does not explicitly or implicitly adopt some version of the ecological and democratic perspectives and assume their normative authority for the subject matter under study. The problem is the reverse—to keep sufficient critical distance between the values and thoughts of persons living and writing hundreds of years ago and our uniquely modern understandings of ecology and democracy!

VI

Let me conclude with a brief description of how a scientist and environmental philosopher, Aldo Leopold, and a Christian liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, each combine the ecological world view and the democratic ideal in their interpretations of the particular form of engagement between spirit, nature, and humanity that they find most important under contemporary circumstances.

Aldo Leopold's personal practice and intellectual concern were focused on a form of the bioregional participation paradigm that he called "the land ethic." In his Sand County Almanac he takes us into his confidence and shares with us his intimate engagements with the land on his river-bottom farm on the Wisconsin River. In the course of his stories of trips out and about his farm and its environs, we learn with him how human well-being is interdependent with the well-being of all the creatures of the land and especially with the health of the land as a whole, and what kind of spiritual beauty pervades the daily round when this kind of interdependence is practiced with scientific knowledge and esthetic sensitivity. We also learn about the tragic consequences of the lack of such healthy practices, and the rewards that are reaped for nature and human community when these practices are laboriously reinvented and restored.

The "land ethic" is defined at the end of the book as the summary statement of his experience. Leopold arrives at his definition from two directions: first, from the direction of the ecological world view, second from the direction of the democratic ideal. The ecological world view includes a description of the biotic pyramid in which we participate together with all other forms of life; the democratic ideal is our responsibility as citizens for one another and for the well-being of the community as a whole. These come together as follows: "A land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow members, and also respect for the community as such . . . A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."52 Aldo Leopold's land ethic is now the exemplary expression of the bioregional way of engaging our natural environment the world over.

Leonardo Boff is national adviser to the movement of base communities in Brazil, and was a powerful voice at Rio four years ago. He has taken prophetic, unpopular positions with respect to the policies of church and state and suffered personally in consequence. He is intimately involved in the struggles of those who are at the bottom of the biotic, economic and political pyramid of the Brazilian bioregion. The practice that he follows is an expression of what I have called the paradigm of compassion for the sufferings of life: a spirituality of compassion and co-suffering modeled on the ministry of Jesus to the poor and excluded, expanded now to include the species and ecosystems of this biologically rich country that are being violated and pressed to the margins of survival, and have no way to speak on their own behalf. For this reason the example of St. Francis is especially important to him.

Boff's recent interpretation of Christian liberation theology is set firmly in the context of what he calls "ecologico-social democracy." By Boff's definition, "ecology is the science and art of relations and of related being."53 Democracy is a "universal spirit and value" and "as envisaged now by so many groups in Latin America, is based on the co-existence and articulation of five founding forces: participation, solidarity, equality, difference, and communion."54 Ecologico-social democracy is the integration of these two:

"What does ecologico-social democracy mean? It is a democracy that accepts not only human beings as its components but every part of nature, especially living species . . . All these beings . . . are also citizens, subject to rights, and should be respected as others, in their own otherness, in their own existence, in their own life, and in their communion with us and with our fate and their future, which may also depend on us."55

In their personal witness and in their writings Leopold and Boff show how the modern sciences and the world's historic religious faiths are each able to contribute to humanity's ability to keep faith with the glory and promise of this planet. They also suggest how the ecological world view and the democratic ideal can combine to serve as the new coordinating center for the plurality of creative, sustaining, and redemptive ways we may engage spirit, nature, and one another.

The task before us as religious leaders and scholars is to join Leopold and Boff and the numerous women and men the world over who have learned how to cross the divides of our historical epoch and reinvent these many splendored paths of earth spirituality, and by means of the practices endemic to our own lives, professions and institutions—through ritual, the arts, speaking, teaching, advocacy, institutional organization, interpersonal care, and a host of other practices—rivet the attention of the human consciousness upon them.

Notes

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4. John O?Neill, Ecology, Policy and Politics: Human Well-Being and the Natural World (London: Routledge, 1993), is one attempt to do so.

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aligns several of the great religious traditions of the world with several of the paradigms we are considering here: Buddhism/compassion for the sufferings of life; Native American spirituality/bioregional participation; Goddess worship/embracing the body; Semitic religions/respect for the rights of all individual beings and stewardship.

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25. See Stephen Fox, John Muir and His Legacy (Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1981), 139-147.

26. see Eugene C. Hargrove, The Animal Rights/Environmental Ethics Debate (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

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