

NEOPAGANISM: A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SYNTHESIS
OF SPIRITUALITY AND NATURE

By

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The major premise of this thesis is that one form of reconnection of spirituality and nature is expressed in the religious tradition of NeoPaganism. The human yearning for transcendence and the reality of physicality have produced in NeoPagans a distinct synthesis of the two, incorporating both archaic forms of this synthesis from more primitive times and futuristic visions of the implications of such a synthesis. NeoPaganism is not only a small and relatively unknown religious phenomenon, but one of the fastest growing forms of spirituality in Europe and North America.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

It is midnight in a forest. Amidst oaks, pines, and magnolias, trimmed with dogwoods and azalea bushes, a large circle is cut a few inches into the ground, marked with stones. In the middle of the circle a fire crackles as it eats moist wood. There is the smell of smoke and fertile soil and cool autumn air, the sound of zephyrs in the trees, the distant call of a coyote, and the feeling of some ancient magic in the bones and blood and dreams of the thirteen skyclad people gathered to worship around the circle. They face inward toward the center and each other as the crickets and cicadas call across the distance of night. At the four directions are four candles. Hands are raised into the air.

“Hail to the spirits of the East, elementals of air, powers of mind and intellect, reason and intelligence. We thank you for your blessings and invite you to join our circle on this the first night of Autumn. Grant us your presence as we feast and celebrate in your honor. Blessed Be.” The words echo through the trees, flow up into the dark sky, glimmer off the full moon of the autumn equinox. Then the assembled turn to the South, West, and North, welcoming each direction, closing the Circle and forming a sacred space-time.

It is Mabon, another turn in the cycle of the year, which, like a circle, has no beginning and no end. These people are NeoPagans, a coven of Wiccans, in fact, who have come to celebrate the turning of the Wheel of the Year, to honor God and Goddess, and to share bread and ale. They are a living synthesis of spirituality and nature.

But before we join them in the forest, we must explore and understand, as best we are able, what it means to fuse spirit and nature together and decide the implications of doing so. We must consider our definitions, our methodology, and our worldview. We must describe ecospirituality and the spiritual environmentalism prominent in this part of the twenty-first century, and we will investigate NeoPaganism and its context in our wider thesis. Then we may at last draw some conclusions and peer briefly into the potential future where we, humankind, have reached a place of peace between our urge to transcendence and divine connection and the reality of our lives on planet Earth.

First we must define our terms. *Spirituality* is the process of linking human with the transcendent, beyond the strictly material world. There are a few major assumptions here: one is that there is something more to the world and us than what we can perceive with the senses. There is a realm of experience and perception “beyond the fields we know” that we call by various names, including enlightenment, salvation, wisdom, bliss, heaven, and nirvana, often with a supreme being(s); connecting with this reality, whether inside us, outside us, or both, is the primary purpose of religious and spiritual traditions. Collectively or in solitude, spirituality can provide a gateway to those realms that have been called “higher” and “transcendent.” It can lift us out of the perimeters of our body, our culture, and our world, to a place of joy, peace, wholeness, and grace.

But if we are to reconcile spirituality and nature, we cannot stop at this transcendent, ascetic definition of the spiritual experience, for to do so is to eliminate the possibility of a real synthesis. We cannot continue to seek our spirituality and those things we regard as sacred in a “higher” place, away from Earth and alienated from Nature. We must transcend the separation between spirituality and nature, and this

requires us to redefine spirituality as immanent as well as transcendent, natural as well as mystical, “us” in addition to “other,” worldly along with otherworldly. We must expand our definition from an exclusive connection between humans and a discreet, heavenly divinity to an interconnection between all life, the earth itself, and the divine. We must relocate our religious focus from narrow and separate to wide and inclusive. The protection of Earth as The Creation in the stewardship model is not sufficient, though it is movement in a hopeful direction.

For the purposes of this thesis, *Nature* is treated as basically synonymous with *Earth*. It is the world around us, especially – but not exclusively – nonhuman, but there is a tacit acceptance that humans emerge from the matrix of Earth, and so are an undeniable part of nature. It is a further assumption of this thesis that for much of our history, Christianity has dominated the religious and social lives of the majority of people in Europe and the Americas. As we will see in Lynn White’s writings, part of the heritage from this dominant theology is the vague sense that we do not live in our true home, that we are alive in this world as part of a larger spiritual journey whose ultimate goal is an eternal afterlife. As we will note in Thomas Berry’s philosophy, this has been the West’s worldview, its Story. The Story is thousands of years old and continues its hold on the semiconscious ethos that places humankind in a special, superior, and separate category of life. The story says that ours is a unique intelligence that allows for the domination of Earth, and ours is the distinctive connection with the transcendent deity who created and is finally judge over all reality, during the temporary lifespan and afterwards for all eternity. The deity, often called *God* is basically a super-human (horses might have a very different concept of divinity, if they have one) whose position is not

only creator-judge, but also champion of various human moral and theological systems, and His supernatural power is brought to bear in its support and defense. Being supernatural, He is seen as above and beyond Earth, encouraging through Earthly religions the emulation of that isolated spiritual state, to make, in other words, the infinite, eternal and non-corporeal realms our real home.

On the other hand, the new ideas about the location and scope of deity, as we will see in the work of James Lovelock and Oberon Zell may be radically shifting to include the entire planet as a conscious meta-being. The implications of this shift include a deep resacralization of Earth and thus the environment. It is in the early stages of this “paradigm shift” that NeoPaganism has emerged and flourished. It is the basic proposition of this thesis that, in fact, NeoPaganism constitutes a powerful expression of the spirituality-nature interface, and is therefore a tradition that strongly synthesizes the two in a living, dynamic religion.

Before we go any further, it is important to admit my personal biases and orientations as an author. This is part of the process of intellectual honesty and puts a human face on the theories, philosophies, and conclusions. For instance, I was born in the United States, at this time the dominant economic, military, and cultural influence on the planet, and I grew up with certain assumptions, like the notion of technological and social progress and inalienable individual rights and freedoms, in the midst of Pax Americana where the reigning cultural motif is liberal, “Western,” and with an optimistic sense of potential and possibility. In other words, I am a child of modernity.

My parents were conservative southern Christians, and I imbibed certain negative aspects of religious fervor that I have since attempted to avoid and even discredit. I have learned to dislike fundamentalism, with its intolerance and exclusivism, in any form.

My country is a product of the Enlightenment, and though I suckled its values, I must agree with Albert Einstein when he said, “We cannot solve the problems we have created with the same thinking that created them.” I see the costs of material wealth, comfort, and security and acutely feel the lack of community, compassion, and spiritual prosperity of modernity. I have never lived where I thought someone was going to kidnap me in the night, bomb my town, or burn my house, and I have never really gone hungry, so I can only speak from a limited perspective. I am a student of spirituality and religion, a practicing NeoPagan, and an artist with children whom I love dearly. All this affects what I believe and write. I have limitations as a writer and sociocultural constraints as a person, but while acknowledging that it is difficult if not actually impossible to be totally objective or free of an historical or cultural context, it is possible to make a contribution to the continuing dialogue.

The thesis follows a chapter format. We begin with this Introduction, proceed to the *Background* of the spirituality-nature synthesis in the work of previous academicians, and then discuss at some length *NeoPaganism* and its essential character as a living spiritual tradition synthesizing spirituality and nature. Finally we will draw some of our own *conclusions*, including a speculative look into a possible future where ecological concerns are sacred ones, and therefore of predominant concern in “Western” cultures.

CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND

We first turn our attention to the task of reviewing the work that has to this point been done in the field currently designated spirituality and nature (or religion and ecology), since it lays the foundation for our investigation of NeoPaganism. We will take a chronological journey, beginning, for our purposes, with Lynn White's widely read and often-quoted essay "The Historical Roots of Our Environmental Crisis" (1967).

To understand the motivation behind the major works of spirituality and nature, one begins with the notion that there is a crisis. There are two aspects to the term "crisis" as we will use it: the first, as we will note again later in the Thesis, is "a decisive or crucial time, stage, or event," a time of change, transformation, and potential; the second definition involves a sense of urgency originating in doubts about the capacity of Earth to absorb the human-created changes to its ecosystems and still support the growing human population. This urgency comes from such authors as Rachel Carson (*Silent Spring*, 1962) and Paul and Ann Ehrlich (*The Population Explosion*, 1990) who warn of the global impact of human activities and the resulting life-threatening changes in the environment, including ozone layer depletion, the greenhouse effect, air and water pollution, topsoil loss, and so on. Both of these definitions of "crisis" inform the work of those who combine a sense of mystical spirituality or religious structure with concern for the environment and help explain some of the motivation, even passion and fervor, of the *ecospirituality* field. In their unique way, each of these writers and thinkers has

contributed to the continuing dialog on this intricate and sometimes emotionally charged subject.

Lynn White

Published as an article in *Science* magazine in 1967, White's essay, "The Historical Roots of Our Environmental Crisis," in many ways fired the opening salvo in the popular discussion of how spirituality, especially Christianity, has affected the current ecological situation. White fashions an essay that critically examines the role of Christianity in the environmental crisis. He dates the beginning of the ecological crisis at about 1850 with the "union of the theoretical and the empirical approaches to our natural environment" and suggests a need to address the "fundamentals" of the problem (1203). The fusion of science and technology, accomplished in part by the spread of democracy and its reduction of social barriers, has brought into question our ability to survive as a species and or even sustain the techno-industrial worldview. White furthers his story of historical change by noting the relationship of humans to nature was fundamentally altered from "part of" to "exploiter" by the introduction of the moldboard plow in early Medieval Europe.

But White's unique contribution to spirituality and nature comes in his examination of the essential character of Christianity and the effect it has had on the history and present of the human-nature relationship in the "West." He begins with a general statement delineating his philosophical position:

What people do about their nature depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human nature is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny--that is, by spirituality. (1205)

He fleshes out this belief by adding that "the victory of Christianity over paganism was the greatest psychic revolution in the history of our culture" (1207). But how has the

“victory of Christianity” contributed to the “environmental crisis”? For one thing, he writes that Christianity inherited from Judaism a nonrepetitive, linear concept of time. Rather than the cyclical time of the pagans, the Judeo-Christian mythology tells of a divine beginning and an apocalyptic end, with the in-between Earthly life of relatively little divinity. Earth and its nature, therefore, are of little importance. Other Christian biblical stories set humans at the pinnacle of creation, and God himself is said to have ordered humankind to take dominion over the Earth in a kind of benevolent stewardship that has through time come to allow exploitation of natural resources without regard to how nature, and thus humankind, is being impacted. If this life is just a temporary space-time between creation and the afterlife, why would one care? Further, by “destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects” (1207). In fact, combining the effects of scientism and Christianity, considering the “feelings of natural objects” is often considered absurd.

White’s conclusion is that the ecological effects of the combination of science and technology are out of control, and that “Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt” (1206). He points out that non-Christians hold the Christian attitude toward “man’s relation to nature” as well but traces these dangerous attitudes back to Christian dogma. White, then, was one of the early voices assigning blame, and therefore responsibility, for the ecological crisis to Christianity, and naming religion as bearer of some of the burden for a solution to that crisis.

Lynn White’s unique contribution to the study of spirituality and nature is both in initiating the debate about the significance of especially monotheistic spirituality on our treatment of the environment and in bringing the tradition that has created the dominant

religious *zeitgeist*, Christianity, to task for what he believes is its contribution to the current environmental crisis. His historical critique struck a chord with both religious persons and environmentalists and, for better or for worse, set the direction of the debate for several years after its publication. White marks the early discussion of the role of spirituality in the treatment of the environment and conceptualization of ecological issues. The door was flung open for others to walk through and travel the path we follow in these pages.

Eugene Hargrove

In the preface to his edited volume *Religion and Environmental Crisis* (1986), environmental philosopher Hargrove lays out the unique contribution of his own subdiscipline of philosophy, environmental ethics, to the study of spirituality and nature. Using his philosopher's approach, he emphasizes the contributions of differing religious traditions including native American, Taoist, Islamic, and Christian to the concerns of ethics as it applies to the environment. Environmental ethics has, for example, "provided a valuable critique of the 'rights' arguments commonly advanced by environmentalists and animal liberationists in this century" (xi). Part of that critique consisted of argument between those who believed nature had intrinsic value related to its use by humans and those who took the more radical view that nature had value "independent of our human valuational framework" (xii). However, Hargrove concedes that there is more to the situation than pure ethics can cover. To deal with the deeper aspects of the human-created ecological crisis, we must have additional tools at hand.

To deal with fundamental problems of motivation we must go beyond environmental ethics and deal with worldviews, and it is here that spirituality has an important role to play (xii).

Although Hargrove is coming to the question from the philosophical position of environmental ethics, he recognizes that philosophy alone is not sufficient to attend to the deepest causes of the ecological crisis. Religion, or more broadly “worldview,” affects people in a profound way, reaching into the very core of our individual psyches and spirits, and what resonates there has an effect on external behavior. Hargrove believes, like Aldo Leopold, that ecological action must be linked to religious belief.

Hargrove also remarks on the effects of the “Lynn White debate.” He generally regards it as negative and regards the future of the environmental ethics debate as taking place outside of the “dead end” White-centered arguments. A comparative religious approach, that is, examining the ecologically responsible elements in different religious traditions, the approach in *Religion and Environmental Crisis*, is the one currently favored in the *ethics* community. It should also be noted that the idea of “crisis” is again at the fore of the issue. The ongoing studies and reports from the scientific discipline of ecology reinforce a sense of urgency about the state of the earth’s biosustainability. This places the debate in unique terms: it is not just a philosophical discussion but also an impassioned and high-stakes debate pulling in more than one discipline and igniting activists as well as scholars.

Hargrove is important because of his work in establishing *environmental ethics* as a viable field of academic study. In 1979 he founded the journal of the same name by which the entire field came to be known and which dramatically improved opportunities for scholars to publish their work. His other work has included issues in environmental law and animal rights, including a compendium he edited called *The Animal Rights/Environmental Ethics Debate* (1992). Hargrove is considered a “weak

anthropocentric intrinsic value theorist” since he believes that the fundamental basis for nature is preservation and continuity of humankind, but tempers that with the position that nature also has value intrinsic to itself outside of human use. That nature has “rights” aside from “us” causes the relationship to be changed from one of dominance to one of equality, and it is by addressing the worldviews of people that this is accomplished.

James Lovelock and Stephan Harding

When Lovelock wrote about the Gaia Theory, it was as a scientist proposing, along with Lynn Margulis, a theoretical model of the planet Earth as a self-sustaining and adjusting organism. When he wrote *The Ages of Gaia* (1988), it was because this notion of Earth as a single, living organism had taken on epic proportions and as an idea had broken the boundaries of nature, even science, into the realm of spirituality. The telling chapter, “God and Gaia,” addresses Lovelock’s awareness of the expansion of his original thesis into areas of new meaning. He reveals his own orientation early on when he admits that “Living itself is a religious experience,” and when he remembers that as a boy his thoughts on spirituality grew from an “odd mixture, composed of witches, May trees, and the views expressed by Quakers” (204). His personal thoughts very much synthesize spirituality and nature when he states that

Gaia is a religious as well as a scientific concept, and in both spheres it is manageable . . . God and Gaia, theology and science, even physics and biology are not separate but a single way of thought. (206)

Such unlikely unions are only one of Lovelock’s surprising sentiments. He also relates the theory of the conquest of primal Goddess cultures by Indo-European “Aryans” and the destructive results of that triumph. Though he does not see Earth as a sentient being, his work suggesting it as a self-maintaining and adjusting life form helped initiate

a new way of viewing the planet, first in a holistic rather than reductionist model, and second as the whole of which humans are one radically intertwined feature. These views are all the more positive coming from a scientist endowed with the particular genius that sees beyond categories to a reality that is encompassing and transcendent.

The implications of the Gaia Theory are well explicated by a University of Lancaster web site prepared by Noel Charlton. He suggests that “Gaian thinking” is an alternative to the mechanistic, reductionist, and competitive worldview typical in science, showing rather “the living world as interconnected, in some sense meaningful.” The Gaian world has much to do with cooperation, allowing for a metaphor of community. This raises the question of whether ethical concerns might extend beyond humans to other sentient beings, or whether we might come to see ourselves as “significant parts of a symphonic interaction.”

Could the whole earth as a single life preserving system command our respect, awe, even reverence? Could an understanding of Gaia become the focus for attitudes we have called ‘religious’, thus influencing change in human impact on the planetary process? (<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/depts/philosophy/mave/guide/gaiath~1.htm>)

Indeed, these are some of the questions this Thesis hopes to positively address. Further, in the Forward to Anne Primavesi’s book *Sacred Gaia* (2000), Lovelock writes that

There is more to Gaia theory than a change of viewpoint; the theory enters the realm of emergent phenomena, a place where the whole is always more than the sum of the parts. (xii)

“Emergent phenomena” is an important subject in the synthesis of spirituality and nature and will have to be more seriously integrated into hitherto reductionist science if the meta and macro scales of life and the place of the spirit-animal homo sapiens are to be fully understood.

Lovelock's unique contribution, then, is the popularization of the initially startling notion that Earth is a single living organism and, by extension, has states of health and dis-ease like any organism. Not only are our fates as a species intimately connected to the planet, but we also bear some responsibility as sentient beings ourselves to protect the metasytem in which we exist. The image of Earth as "living" rather than as a dead sphere on which life clings tenaciously, cannot be underestimated in its subliminal as well as conscious power.

One of the computer models Lovelock used to illustrate the self-sustaining and "life-preserving" nature of Earth and to suggest its status as meta-organism was "Daisyworld," and one of the scientists working with him was Stephan Harding. Harding taught at Schumacher College, an international center for ecological studies in England, and was the resident ecologist there. His work, as exemplified in the web essay "From Gaia Theory to Deep Ecology" (web site), is in part a critical view of the scientism of nature from inside the discipline, critiquing nature from the wider perspective of what he calls the "Gaian perception." He begins by stating the perquisite for such a perception: "To understand Gaia, we must let go of the mechanistic, compartmentalizing conditioning imposed on us since childhood by our society." That is, we must review and modify the purely scientific and thus constricted worldview most of us grew up with as an assumption of ultimate reality. The full comprehension of nature requires a holistic stance personified by Gaia:

A Gaian approach opens new doors of perception and opens up our vision of the inter-dependence of all things within the natural world. There is a symphonic quality to this interconnectedness, a quality that communicates an unspeakable magnificence. (<http://schumachercollege.gn.apc.org/articles/stephan.htm>)

But this “magnificence” cannot be totally perceived by intellectual consideration alone. It must also be subjectively *experienced*. There is a sense of the importance of direct and intimate familiarity with the complexity of Earth, and an almost poetic sense of the need for a deep relationship with nature that mere intellectual observation cannot accomplish. It is, in part, the lack of this familiar relationship between the planet and humankind along with a profound experiential ignorance that contributes to the environmental crisis referred to by Lynn White.

Harding’s explanation of these subjective experiences often sounds mystical in a way echoed by many religious traditions of the world:

As you experience this dynamic, ever-shifting reality, you may suddenly find yourself in a state of meditation, a state in which you lose your sense of separate identity, and become totally engrossed in the life process being contemplated. The contemplated and the contemplator become one.
(<http://schumachercollege.gn.apc.org/articles/stephan.htm>)

Rather than the connection with a discreet divine entity like a god or supernatural spirit, nature is the focus of this contemplation. In becoming one with nature, the alienation White mentioned is eliminated and a new perception is created in the contemplator: *empathy*.

From this oneness there arises a deep appreciation of the reality of inter-dependence, and from this comes the urge to be involved in opposing all sorts of ecological abuses. Here arises the feeling that what is happening in evolution has great value and a meaning impossible to articulate or to detect via reductionist scientific methodology. This highly developed sensitivity, this experience of radical interconnectedness, is the hallmark of supporters of the Deep Ecology movement, and is the basis for the elaboration of any ecological philosophy, such as the pioneering work of the Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, who first coined the term 'deep ecology'. (<http://schumachercollege.gn.apc.org/articles/stephan.htm>)

Without a “highly developed sensitivity” and an “experience of radical interconnectedness” with the earth, empathy cannot be cultivated to the degree needed to stimulate fundamental changes in the current scientific-industrial orientation towards the

environment. Without it, humans become little better than a pestilence, constantly out of balance with the planetary support system. Yet, for Harding, as for many who work in the realm of spiritual nature, there is hope mingled in with warning: that “Gaian perception helps to remedy this great mental and spiritual plague.”

Harding seeks to bridge the apparent chasm between the objective scientism of the modern era and the subjective experientialism of the post-modern era by relating the close contact with nature typical of scientific research and curiosity with the ability to empathize with that nature. By suggesting that empathy is a real and useful emotive response to nature, he seeks to introduce non-empirical spirituality – that is, a sense of wholeness and deep significance – to our sensory perceptions of nature so that they come to instill in us a sense of value and sacredness. From this position, environmental protection would become a normal, internally generated ethic, an assumed character of civilized society taught from childhood and integrated into the culture as a fundamental worldview.

Riane Eisler

One important task in the work of spirituality and nature is the placing of the environmental issue in a wider historical and cultural context. This contextualizing helps us to see how and why our attitudes towards the earth exist and gives hints as to how we might overcome the negative ones in our efforts to create a sustainable society and world.

In Riane Eisler’s contribution to Roger Gottlieb’s collection of essays *This Sacred Earth* (1996), entitled “Messages From the Past: The World of the Goddess,” the conclusion is that “most of what we have learned to think of as our cultural evolution has in fact been interpretation” (369). It has been an interpretation through the template of a “dominator worldview” that has held to a “linear progression” from primitive to

advanced civilization and shares a “preoccupation with conquering, killing, and dominating” (369). In other words, it has only allowed for its own values, history being filtered through one set of behaviors and beliefs. Eisler’s work, however, posits a very different interpretive orientation, one that utilizes contemporary archeological evidence to offer a fresh analytical perspective and a retelling of the “story of our cultural origins” (370).

Like the feminist contentions of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Eisler uses the abundant examples of “pre-historic” art, with its lack of military or hierarchical images, to suggest a more egalitarian social order and the prevalence of the veneration of the Goddess. Again, as with Ruether, we see a connection made between worship of a feminine Goddess and respect for nature. The central religious images of Neolithic and Minoan art are that of natural events and characters, and that of fecund feminine figurines, hinting at abundance and a flourishing coexistence with the natural world. Eisler’s major literary work, *The Chalice and the Blade* (1988), from which this essay is taken, is basically a critique of the underlying cultural assumptions of human behavior, destructive or constructive, oppressive or cooperative. The blade is a symbol for the masculine-dominated worldview wherein “conquering, killing, and dominating” are the major values, as opposed to the chalice, which symbolizes not feminine-domination as much as a gender-balanced worldview wherein cooperation, deep equality, and nurturance are the major values. Thus the Goddess becomes a meta-symbol for the religious and spiritual worldview and cultural values represented by the chalice, one that is applicable to the relationship between humans and nature in the sense that balance and equality in the relationships of humanity are also critical in the relationship between

humanity and Earth. What Eisler finds in Neolithic art, for instance, is “a rich array of symbols from nature. Associated with the worship of the Goddess, these attest to awe and wonder at the beauty and mystery of life” (370-371). Words like “awe” and “mystery” suggest an understanding of the human place in nature: we are members of a biocommunity that is currently interdependent so that the survival of one member requires the health of the whole interconnected system. The human stance towards the environment must be one of intelligent cooperation, awareness of interdependency and the need for mutual support, and the nurturance of critical relationships. When one’s deity is a Goddess, all the symbolic weight of this divine concept, and perhaps reality, is brought to bear on the environmental crisis. When one’s supreme being includes or is exclusively feminine, the values and worldview one is obligated to possess to be in harmony with divinity includes preservation of Earth. This will be important, as we will see, later in the thesis.

Eisler’s work brings scholarly critique to bear on the assumptions and resulting values of cultures around the world by interpreting them through two categories: dominator and partnership. These two models provide a framework for assessing cultures based on their level of violence and conflict or peacefulness and cooperation. We are then able to discern historical and sociological patterns that reveal alternative cultural orientations more benevolent towards nature and with a greater capacity for environmental empathy and ethics. The interpretation of societies into “blade” or “chalice” sheds a new kind of light from a slightly different angle than has been traditionally applied. Like the feminist perspective of Ruether, the dominator/partnership

model sets up perimeters for discerning worldviews and ethos's that are fundamentally eco-destructive from those that are potentially eco-friendly, sustainable, and enduring.

Thomas Berry

In *The Dream of the Earth* (1988) Thomas Berry suggests that what we need in this time of ecological crisis is a new story. He is confident there is a crisis and that it is both environmental and spiritual but also that there is salvation through the new story. He believes, for instance, that the old dreams of an unlimited industrial technoworld currently dominant are a story that leads not to prosperity but destruction. Science alone is not enough to complete the story, for it lacks a value system to create a moral imperative of protecting Earth and each other. Spirituality alone is not enough, either, for it remains steeped in otherworldly asceticism without a firm enough grounding in physical reality. But together, they create a synthesis, a marriage, that he believes can be long and prosperous. It is the hope for this successful marriage that is one element in Earth's "dream."

An important part of the new story is emergent ethical evolution. Berry suggests that science is part of the process of evolution, and that while science is partially responsible for the environmental crisis - it was technology that produced the industrial revolution - it is also a factor in the solution to that crisis. He claims that our increasing empirical knowledge, which is the product of scientific investigation, gives us a "new clarity" in relationship with the universe.

We are more intimate with every particle of the universe and with the vast design of the whole. We see it and hear it and commune with it as never before. Not only in its spatial extension, but also in its emergent process, we are intimate with the world about us. (16)

Our new empirical knowing has allowed for a new intimacy with nature, a closeness, a new kind of relationship – not as slave to unfathomable master, but as familiar equals. Our knowledge about how the universe works not only allows us to manipulate nature in ways that are potentially threatening to our species, it also brings a bond of intimacy and communion. That communion is not only with the microcosm of the universe’s parts, but also with its macrocosm, the “vast design of the whole.” In this intimacy lies the potential for empathy, the ability of humanity to identify with nature in a way that allows self-identification with the larger whole and thus engenders a mutual respect and preservation.

We have become aware through empirical familiarity not only how incomprehensibly grand and infinitely microscopic the universe is but also of the “emergent process” of evolution. We have discovered that the world is not static but is a continuum of recurring creation, destruction, renewal, and transformation. The universe is not a linear event with a singular beginning and end; it is a continuum of natural cycles out of which we as a species have emerged and with which we share kinship.

In some ways, it may be argued that Berry’s emergent evolution replaces “God” as a creative matrix from which humans come into existence, the difference being that instead of being created from the power of a spiritual superbeing as conceived differently by various cultures, we have emerged over time from natural phenomena, observable by all cultures and confirmable by everyone. Berry’s interpretation of those observations, though they are in some ways mythological, moves us closer to a new story and an environmental ethic that he hopes will result in ecological integrity.

Berry makes his contribution to EcoSpirituality by setting the universe's history in terms of a "story," and by writing a seminal work extending the compassion of caring for the well being to the planet as a whole as if it were priceless jewel and, even more importantly, a treasured friend. He has presented, in prosaic terms, a vision of the human-Earth relationship using new eyes and ears, ones able to perceive more deeply and empathetically than before. Anchored in the emergent evolution theories and biological rigor of science, Berry lifts the debate out of the purely objective realm to a very personal dialogue that is both epistemological and ontological. His voice is not so much that of academic scholar as it is thoughtful shaman, and the uniqueness of this perspective should not be underestimated nor its value in linking spirituality and nature.

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim

Few academics have been as influential in the organizational phase of spirituality and nature as a discipline than Tucker and Grim. Together they have initiated seminars, called for papers, and generally been a focal point for the field. Though each has their specialty – Tucker in Confucianism and Grim in Native American religion – their most significant contribution for our purposes has been in playing major roles in the formation of ecospirituality through the establishment of religion and ecology as an academic field. Their two main avenues of endeavor has been the editing of collections of published essays in book form, among them *Worldviews and Ecology*, the directing of a series of ten conferences on Religions of the World and Ecology at Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions, and the creation of an extensive web site. Through these formats, Tucker and Grim have helped facilitate the movement of religion and ecology and give voices to those working in the discipline, including several of the writers cited in this chapter.

Tucker herself co-edited two of the Harvard Conference volumes, *Buddhism and Ecology* and *Confucianism and Ecology*, but it is Grim's *Indigenous Peoples and Religion* (2001) that we will use as the exemplar. This 700-page collection is one of a planned series showcasing different aspects of the religion and ecology approach. In the Series Introduction, Tucker and Grim are also acutely aware of the sense of environmental crisis and, because "it is also a moral and spiritual crisis," propose religion as a powerful ethical part of its solution (xvi). Religions are re-examined for their contributions to the formative cultural worldviews and, while respecting the intrinsic distinction of each tradition, discover their commonly held ecological dimensions. Such an effort, Tucker and Grim are quick to admit, is problematic but well worthwhile, being "built on the premise that the religions of the world may be instrumental in addressing the moral dilemmas created by the environmental crisis" (xix). Religion, for Tucker and Grim, constitutes a viable and perhaps integral ally in raising the awareness of and finding a deep source for healing of the "environmental crisis." Its contributions are uniquely transcendent and powerful in modifying destructive human behavior.

At the same time as religions foster awe and reverence for nature, they may provide the transforming energies for ethical practices to protect endangered ecosystems, threatened species, and diminishing resources. (xxi)

The text itself focuses on the unique contributions that indigenous peoples, retaining as they often do ancient and certainly pre-modern worldviews more in harmony and balance with their bioregion, and thus more sustainable as a biologically aware culture. In describing these various traditions, the book identifies three major concerns: a "critical understanding of the complexity, contexts, and frameworks in which these spiritualities articulate such views," the achieving of an "empathetic appreciation for the traditions without idealizing their ecological potential or ignoring their environmental

oversights,” and a “creative revisioning of mutually enhancing human-earth relations” (xxii). These three concerns imply a scholarly critique of each tradition in their sociological and cultural contexts, a participant-observer stance neither critical nor acquiescent, and an eye to the future.

Religion is regarded by Tucker and Grim as integral to the process of healing the environmental crisis by bridging the conceptual gulf between nature-as-intrinsically valuable and religion as inherently transcendent.

If religions have traditionally concentrated on divine-human and human-human relations, the challenge is that they now explore more fully divine-human-earth relations. Without such further exploration, adequate environmental ethics may not emerge in a comprehensive context. (xxiv)

Specific territory is being staked out here: the necessity of the “divine-human-earth” relation leading to “adequate environmental ethics,” adequate, we may surmise, for the survival of the human species. This is a specific set of relationships that includes “earth” as an important, if not equal, member.

The web site, *the Forum on Religion and Ecology*, is an extensive resource bringing together a wide variety of data from various sources. In Tucker and Grim’s own words:

The environmental crisis . . . requires major changes in how we think about our world and how we interact with other people and the environment. In response to this challenge, there is growing recognition that multi-disciplinary efforts are necessary to produce comprehensive resolutions to our environmental problems. The Forum on Religion and Ecology is at the forefront of this emerging interdisciplinary dialogue . . . by highlighting the important roles that religious traditions play in constructing moral frameworks and orientating narratives regarding human interactions with the environment. It is our hope that by understanding these historical/cultural connections we can find new ways to revision future human-earth relations.
(<http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/main.html>)

In this statement of purpose, several of the fundamental points also made in my thesis are condensed. We note the assumption that there is an environmental crisis that demands a cogent response. Further is the belief that part of this response “requires major changes in how we think about our world,” meaning, I think, a shift in worldview—one represented, as we will see, by NeoPaganism. It is in this way that “the important roles that religious traditions play in constructing moral frameworks and orientating narratives regarding human interactions with the environment” is highlighted and focused on a religious tradition for whom the sacredness of Earth is a tenet and Her protection a widely held value.

The unique contribution of Tucker and Grim, then, is in organizing a series of conferences and publications “exploring the various religions of the world and their relation to ecology,” and so initiating the “emerging interdisciplinary dialogue” that continues with this Thesis. They have more than a passing intellectual interest in exploring “divine-human-earth relations.” It is more of a conviction, an intuitive, creative response to a perceived crisis of truly global proportions. Accordingly, their work is meant to “expand the discussion already underway in certain circles and to invite further collaboration on a topic of common concern - the fate of the earth as a religious responsibility.” Their legacy is that they have achieved this goal with great success.

Matthew Fox

Since the publication of *Original Blessing* (1983), Matthew Fox has become an influential voice in the spirituality and nature movement, blending New Age ideas of spiritual universalism and multiculturalism with the resuscitation of medieval Catholic mystics like Meister Eckhart and their transcendent visions of what Fox calls *creation spirituality*, one of the core ideas of his work. Fox published *Creation Spirituality*:

Liberating gifts for the peoples of the earth (1991). In it, he explicates his theology and philosophy by creating a matrix of symbols and beliefs, within the basic framework of Christianity that incorporates nature into a new tradition and movement. Creation is described as “all things and us,” “all space, all time,” and at its core, “relation” (9). Spirituality is “life, *ruah*, breath, wind,” “a life-filled path, a spirit-filled way of living,” and a “deeply personal” but also “radically communitarian” journey (11-12).

Fox places our spiritual lives within the grander context of the whole universe, our billions-year-old planet Earth, and life as it has arisen in the continuing miracle of planetary evolution. By melding the vocabulary of spirit and science, he synthesizes the two into a new thesis where they aren’t in conflict but are both part of the infinite, eternal, and dynamic cosmos. Since we are part of this matrix of Creation, we have a responsibility to protect and nurture each other and all of Creation since doing so is in effect protecting and nurturing ourselves. Loving our neighbor as ourselves takes on a fresh meaning and urgency.

Fox regards Creation Spirituality as both a tradition and a movement. As a tradition, he sees it not as newly invented but newly discovered, ancient but neglected. As shared by many Pagan cultures around the world, it is a tradition of divinity in all things (panentheism), but it’s also endemic to the Bible and Christianity, as Fox notes, pointing to Genesis, Jesus’ parables, and twelfth-century mystic prophets like Hildegard of Bingen, Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, and Eckhart.

As a movement, Fox notes that Creation Spirituality causes ecstasy in those who rediscover this long-lost heritage from their own Western roots, and “they want the spirit that liberates their souls to be put to good use liberating others” (16). Evangelical

Ecotheology? Perhaps, for he sees gatherings of like minds at the oasis of this new spirit: “deep ecologists, ecumenists, artists, native peoples, justice activists, feminists, male liberationists, gay and lesbian peoples” and so on, a litany of human potential, a congregation of spiritually and theologically adventurous people re-membering the past and giving it new life in the present (16).

If we’re in conflict with our environment, we can’t begin to mend the tears in the fabric of our relations with each other, for all of these are co-symptomatic and interdependent. Fox takes a wider view, a holistic, inclusive and compassionate stance, in a way that very much echoes the life and words of Jesus himself, who did refer to nature in many of his teachings. The gifts of Creation Spirituality – awe, cosmology, liberation, wisdom, and an acknowledgment of the holiness of Creation - builds a firm foundation for our studies in spirituality and nature, hinting at the wider implications and mysteries to come: the exploration of how the religious enterprise became alienated from nature in the first place, by what means it can be reunited, what such a synthesis would look like and manifest in the world and the future, and which naturocentric traditions might make a contribution to this new world.

So Fox makes his unique contribution in three ways: first, he offers an historical critique of the Medieval Christian mystics, interpreting their connection to nature in light of contemporary ecological concerns. Second, he encompasses New Age ideals of individual spirituality and ecumenical inclusion, along with the recent scientific discoveries in quantum physics and chaos theory that seem to suggest a full-circle meeting between the more mystical aspects of those scientific discoveries with the language of the Medieval mystics. And third, he draws on non-religious disciplines and

activities, such as art, music, drama, and other forms of self-expression and community, to enhance the personal liberation theology and empowerment program, to which spirituality and religion serve as a central metaphysical element.

But perhaps his major contribution to this thesis is his idea of panentheism, the belief that God is *in* everything. As a form of animism, seeing divinity within all of nature is a step in the direction of an Earth-human-spirit synthesis, one which Fox is acutely aware: in many of his courses at his University of Creation Spirituality, he espouses the NeoPagan worldview, including those classes taught by Starhawk, a witch, whom we will meet shortly.

Rosemary Radford Ruether

In the area of feminist Christian theology, Ruether is a preeminent voice. Her main contribution has been a scholarly approach to feminist critique, and the connecting of the feminist perspective to the questions of spirituality and nature in the form of eco-feminism. Bringing this voice to academic study tends to shift the perimeters of the field in directions conducive to its expansion into new and potentially fruitful areas often considered unconventional to intellectual inquiry. Certainly she tends to filter her critique through the lens of feminism, as in such works as *New Woman, New Earth* (1975), and she ties the emergence of women and feminine energy into the greater society to ecological ethics and environmental salvation. She has also been one of the few academic scholars willing to engage new religious movements such as Wiccans in debate and discussion.

In Part IV of *This Sacred Earth*, “Ecotheology in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” the theme of the section is reflected in its subtitle: Ecofeminist Spirituality. After a series of quotes, including one from the NeoPagan author Starhawk comes Ruether’s

essay, “Ecofeminism: Symbolic and Social Connections of the Oppression of Women and the Domination of Nature.” The critique of the connection between patriarchal religions and the treatment of women and the Earth, both often regarded as “feminine,” is one facet of the general examination of the impact of spirituality on environmental concerns. Ruether begins with a definition of ecofeminism, calling it “the union of the radical ecology movement, or what has been called ‘deep ecology,’ and feminism” (322). Deep Ecology, she notes, “examines the symbolic, psychological, and ethical patterns of destructive relations of humans with nature and how to replace this with a life-affirming culture” (322). Feminism, though a complex movement, is regarded, in its form as cultural and consciousness analysis, as the primary expression of deep ecology. The domination of women and the domination of nature must be replaced with an alternative ethic where both are honored, a change in attitude toward one naturally aiding, through their connection, the change in attitude toward the other. Like Mary Daly, Carol Christ, and Judith Plaskow, Ruether makes a case that the fates of women and nature are intertwined.

Ruether also echoes, in stark terms, the sense of an ecological crisis that is overtaking humankind but focuses the cause on the injustices inherent in the “Western scientific Industrial Revolution” and its patriarchal foundation while the solution she finds in an “ecofeminist ethic and culture” (329). The connections between scientism and patriarchy have been copiously explicated by Ruether and others. One aspect of the feminist perspective is the recognition of the cycles of nature and our place as a species within those cycles. Ruether states explicitly that

We need to recognize our utter dependence on the great life-producing matrix of the planet in order to learn to reintegrate our human systems of production, consumption, and waste into the ecological patterns by which nature sustains life.

adding that

such a reintegration of human consciousness and nature must reshape the concept of God, instead of modeling God after alienated male consciousness, outside of and ruling over nature. (330)

Women, it may be argued, have more explicit physical cycles than men and are more involved in the birthing and nursing of infants, so these values – the circle of life and nurturing of nature – are imbedded in Ruether’s feminist critique. It might also be argued, however, that certain socio-historical patterns have exacerbated the lack of these values in men, creating an “alienated male consciousness” that is then projected into concepts of the Godhead. “. . . ecofeminist culture must reshape our basic sense of self in relation to the life cycle,” as Ruether puts it, the goal being “new social and technological ways of organizing human life in relation to one another and to nature” (331).

Roger Gottlieb

In the Introduction to the collection of essays *This Sacred Earth* (1996), for which he served as editor, Gottlieb, who is Professor of Philosophy at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and author of ten books on spirituality, politics, and environment, asks two key questions that help delineate the subject matter of the book: “How has religion shaped our understanding of and our conduct towards nature?” and “how has the environmental crisis challenged and transformed modern theology and spiritual practice?” (8). The introduction, “Religion in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” presupposes, as we commented in the beginning of this chapter, that there is a crisis, and that it is both

caused and ought to be addressed by spirituality. It also contains Gottlieb's basic definition of religion:

By religion I mean those systems of belief, ritual, institutional life, spiritual aspiration, and ethical orientation which are premised on an understanding of human being as *other* or *more than simply* their purely social or physical selves. (8)

This will do as a beginning, at least: the concept of religion or spirituality as implying humans as "other" or "more" than physical or sociological reality can account for finds favor in this thesis. As to the "environmental crisis," Gottlieb points out eight "areas of acute concern": global climate/atmospheric change, toxic wastes, loss of land, loss of species, loss of wilderness, devastation of indigenous peoples, human patterns and quantities of consumption, and genetic engineering. Each of these has numerous and devastating examples, enough so that most rational, thoughtful persons would find justification for concern, especially considering the high stakes, which are, according to some, nothing less than our survival as a species. The failure to be concerned because of shortsightedness or ignorance is a collapse of the survival instinct in humans and thus the wider biosphere, an event commonly known as "ecocide."

In his article "Spiritual Deep Ecology and the Left: An attempt at reconciliation," Gottlieb makes a case for the effort of living an environmentally sensitive life as "overcoming a kind of alienation from essential aspects of our own selves" (517). He sees an inherent human connection hardwired into our sense of humanness. In contrast, deep ecology, feminism, and other social critique movements center on human freedoms and social justice issues, and he submits that both views are needed to avoid ecocide. This is nothing less than a revamping of the "notions of human identity" to include ecological awareness and unity as a rejection of the common religious and scientific "distinctions between humanity and non-human nature" and its resulting isolation (518).

Such a new identification process is, in his opinion, a spiritual enterprise because it involves expanding the “sense of what people are.” There is, in the end, no conflict between social justice issues, personal freedom and civil rights, and the protection of the environment on which all other movements and struggles are founded. This is framed as a “reconciliation of deep ecology and radical politics” (529).

In his 1999 book *A Spirituality of Resistance* (1999), Gottlieb makes the connections between social justice and nature explicit. Comparing the social forces that led to the genocide of the Holocaust with those forces that are currently leading to ecocide, he suggests that what is needed is myriad: more spirituality, a sense of anger that leads to non-violent action, and a celebration of nature leading to peaceful but effective resistance against its destruction. Beyond the intellectualization of the crisis, Gottlieb offers a simple, heart-centered message:

This is, quite simply, the world in which I live. It is my Earth, which I share with people and dolphins, squirrels and earthworms. I love it; and I fear for its future. I love it; and I mourn over and over, for the pain of past and present. (1)

This is the ethical crux of the environmental movement and the impetus behind the writings and activism employed by environmentalists. It is, in other words, the emotional space from which Gottlieb’s work emerges, and it is a deep reality for many who work on behalf of Earth. Protection of the ecosphere is founded in the fundamental question of human happiness and concern for one’s children. He acknowledges a lack of empathy in dealing with both *Others* in the human sense and *Other* in terms of nature. Spirituality is the traditional moral call for resistance against evil and suffering, a call that he extends to the destruction of Earth, whose demise will cause the most evil and suffering humankind has ever known. Action becomes nothing less than an act of love.

Gottlieb is unique not just for his editorial work in bringing together several important writers in the field of spirituality and nature; he also writes passionately about spiritual nature as a human justice issue. He examines his subjects from humanitarian and political orientations that explicate a socialist critique of the environmental movement, its motivations and results. He fairly consistently makes the point that neither political nor environmental struggles ought to sacrifice the other to achieve their goals. Both can succeed, perhaps simultaneously and interdependently.

Bron Taylor

As Roger Gottlieb states in the Introduction to Part VI of *This Sacred Earth*, “For many people, the heart of religious life resides not in abstract theology, but in rites and ceremonies” (448). Indeed, for many people spiritual belief, praxis, and commitment are wed to environmental activism. It is through direct action that one’s commitment to preserving the earth and all her life is manifest. One of the more active groups is the radical environmental posse Earth First!, and some of the best research done on this end of the activist spectrum is by Bron Taylor. In “Earth First!: From Primal Spirituality to Ecological Resistance” (1996), Taylor examines this phenomenon with a sympathetic eye. He first speaks of the “spiritual perceptions underpinning these tactics” of ecotage and the religious undercurrent of Paganism which informs the passionate protection of Earth by what Taylor calls “nature mystics,” “primal spirituality,” and “pagan environmentalism.”

Such labels express the pantheistic and animistic experiences (including shamanistic beliefs and experiences of interspecies communication) that many of these activists share . . . many of these activists call themselves pagans, and believe they are reconstructing nature spiritualities violently suppressed by the world’s monotheistic traditions. (549)

A connection is made then, through empathy and even “interspecies communication” between humans and non-human nature, especially the wilderness and its wild, untamed inhabitants who have no obvious “use” to humankind. The form of this connection, which is experiential as well as theoretical, is “nature spirituality” often labeled “pagan.”

Taylor suggests that EF! qualifies as an emergent religious movement, claiming that it possesses a cosmogony, a cosmology, a moral anthropology, and eschatology. It also has ritual, including the “Council of All Beings,” and a value system based, at least in part, on the concept of a living Mother Earth – Gaia – and a mystical dialog with and responsibility to the planet as a meta-organism. Gaia as Being, i.e. Lovelock, is also a sentiment in contemporary American NeoPaganism, especially in such pioneering groups as The Church of All Worlds, which we will examine later on in the thesis. Other important values include ecofeminism, similar to what we saw in Ruether, bio-regionalism, mythic identification with the wilderness and its wild inhabitants, and an acute sense of apocalypticism based on the very real possibility of ecological meltdown and the destruction of ecosystems to the point of wide-scale disaster and the decline of human populations and infrastructures. All these combined create a picture of a spiritual tradition in the making, one radically different than the “Great Religions” of the world.

A final component of Earth First! is activism. From political action to ecotage, EF!ers respond to their value system in an active and involved way. From writing letters to guerrilla theater to monkey-wrenching, EF!ers defy the dominant order in myriad ways, all in the cause of and with the passion of an anthropomorphized planet and the goal of minimizing human impact on the environment in an effort to ease what most of

them see as an inevitable decline of industrial civilization and the emergence of a tribal culture. A new Earth will be born with humans in a humbler relationship with Her, a final vision to complete the sense of EF! as a religious phenomenon.

Taylor's major focus has been those radical environmental groups that possess a fervor and passion for their efforts on behalf of the Earth whose main source is a quasi-religious or fully realized spiritual connection to and assumption about nature. The language used in these groups is often blatantly metaphysical grounded in the biosphere and ecosystems of the planet as a living, even conscious, meta being, implying the possibility of *relationship*. His methodology is basically that of sympathetic participant-observer, interpreting the groups by process of osmosis through broader scholastic definitions and objective tools of examination, including historical and sociological critique. In addition, Taylor brings us closer to our ultimate thesis by introducing the notion of environmental activism as a spiritual quest and by bringing attention to the more tribal ways of social organization within the more radical groups. Tribalism is a critique of modern, techno-industrial society since it is in some ways outside of that society.

Graham Harvey

Graham Harvey, Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at King Alfred's College in Winchester, England, is author of *Contemporary Paganism: listening people, speaking Earth* (1997). His book is an attempt at a broad, inclusive examination of the NeoPagan movement, especially as it manifests itself in Britain. We will invite him into our gallery to segue into the next chapter and because he takes a scholarly look at a major religious tradition that in its essence combines spirituality and nature.

The main point of Harvey's interest in Paganism is summarized in the preface:

Paganism is spirituality at home on Earth, an ecological spirituality, a somatic philosophy of life . . . Paganism is a spirituality in which reciprocal relationships between human and *all* others with whom we share life on Earth are significant. Pagans are people who consider the world to be alive; they are listening to a speaking Earth. (vii)

It is this ability to hear a "speaking Earth," like the communication of the radical environmentalists, that forms the unique contribution of Paganism to addressing the environmental crisis and why Harvey is included in this chapter. A religion that is an "ecological spirituality" and "somatic philosophy" bears the burden of manifesting in actual praxis the writings of many of the authors we have summarized. Paganism's "reciprocal relationships" between humankind and "all others" is the necessary bridge that unites spirituality and nature in real time and space, not just as a philosophical position but also as a practicing spirituality. Harvey's methodology is also of passing interest: "My approach within Religious Studies is phenomenological. That means I take seriously people's self-understanding and self-presentation" (vii-viii). This attitude marks Harvey as one of the few and early scholars to seriously examine, if not thoroughly critique, the contemporary Pagan movement, adding him to the meager but growing list of scholars, including Margot Adler, who sympathetically examine the movement.

Harvey devotes an entire chapter in *Contemporary Paganism* to "Ecology," stating early on that

Paganism is a spirituality in which Nature - the Earth and the body - is central and celebrated. It is fundamentally 'Green' in its philosophy and its practice, taking seriously the understanding that 'everything that lives is holy.' (126)

Paganism, in other words, is not a spirituality that relies on the acceptance of a set of theological propositions. It relies instead on the immediate sensory information of the physical world and organically builds on the historical and contemporary spiritual

relationship such information engenders. The divine is not just “out there” but also immanent in physical matter and the larger world of daily life. All life partakes in sacredness and this relationship is celebrated in rituals and marked on special days corresponding with the changes in nature.

The theories of Gaia hold a special place in the Pagan heart. The concept of Earth as a living organism is appealing since most Pagans regard humankind as living “in” the planet rather than “on” it. The later ideas of Lovelock, the subsequent explorations of a valuated planetary ethic such as the Green activism of Taylor or the empathetic relationship to Earth of Harding and Berry combine to form the historical and cultural context in which Paganism flourishes and expresses its spiritual meaning. In effect NeoPaganism is rooted securely in the fertile soil cultivated by our previous writers and thinkers.

Harvey’s main contribution to the field of spirituality and nature is his attention to contemporary Paganism as an emerging spiritual phenomenon with direct implications for this thesis and for the broader field of study. NeoPaganism’s main value for us is its presence as a synthesis of religious spirituality and ecological awareness and the potential consequences of that synthesis in the greater world of human endeavor and evolution.

Taken together, the unique elements contributed by the preceding authors to spirituality and nature form, in part, the major structural details in the synthesis of spirit and Earth which we will explore in the next chapter. There is the initial critique of Christianity and its contribution to the industrial misuse of nature as “natural resource” to be squandered indiscriminately for human consumption, then the human emotive response to nature – empathy – which in this case is the feeling that non-human life has

worth and value that occurs in brief but meaningful experiences of deep connection to nature. Next are the feminist and progressive social critiques, the telling of a new story in our relationship to Earth, and the foraging of history for mystics that support a contemporary New Age and radically diverse spirituality that includes an ecological worldview. Finally, there is the dominant/partnership model where the present patterns of conflict and alienation are replaced with a worldview and ethos of cooperation, empathetic compassion, and deep community supported by historical and post-modern spiritual traditions.

The drawback of all these perspectives is that each is one part of the whole picture, a picture that is an evolutionary process rather than the search for a static and unchanging truth. This thesis is one more piece to the puzzle of ecospirituality and the long-term prosperity of Earth and Her inhabitants, but it will introduce two unique positions: 1) once the puzzle is complete and we have a useable formula for inducing environmental empathy and thus ecologically responsible behavior, we will probably find that whole puzzle is only part of a still larger puzzle, and 2) it is time for scholarly research to pay attention to that whole puzzle and its description in scholarly terms. I am advocating nothing less than a new format for studying spirituality. To the established methods – historical, sociological, and philosophical – we may add the “ecological” method (for lack of a better term) that studies religion and spirituality specifically as it pertains to and is manifest through the entire ecosystem and Earth.

From this background we may paint the next chapter of the thesis: NeoPaganism as a living, dynamic and integral synthesis of spirituality and nature. The history of spirituality and nature helps us establish the fertile ground for our alchemical garden.

CHAPTER 3 NEOPAGANISM

It is the major premise of this thesis that one form of reconnection of spirituality and nature is expressed in the religious tradition of *NeoPaganism*. The yearning for transcendence and the reality of physicality has produced in NeoPagans a distinct synthesis of the two, incorporating both archaic forms of this synthesis from more primitive times and futuristic visions of the implications of such a synthesis becoming widely accepted and practiced. NeoPaganism is still a small and relatively unknown religious phenomenon, but it is also one of the fastest growing spiritualities of North America and Western Europe.. To understand NeoPaganism more fully, we will first view it in context as a New Religious Movement.

New Religious Movements, Archaism, and NeoPaganism

New Religious Movements (NRMs), as we will use the term, are spiritualities that are either new to existence or new to the United States. Under this definition, the Unification Church, though it possesses elements from Traditional religions – ones that are established in the mainstream American culture – is a new synthesis, a new perspective on traditional themes. The Hare Krishnas are clearly of the second type: an old religion that is simply new upon its arrival in the 1960s to the U.S. NeoPaganism, however, is a hybrid, being based on what NeoPagans consider an ancient lineage that is nevertheless new in its appearance or re-emergence in an updated form to America. Its roots are not oriental or particularly exotic but firmly grounded in ancient occidental

myths and culture. Before we analyze the characteristics of NeoPaganism as a contemporary NRM, let us examine its ancient sources and recent reawakening.

When the Venus of Willendorf figurine was discovered, it fairly quickly came to be interpreted by many as a fertility goddess symbol. There is no proof of this interpretation, but many consider it a reasonable speculation: the figurine bears the physical attributes of fecundity (large, pendulous breasts, a swollen and perhaps pregnant belly) and is faceless. Unless the craftsman that made it left off the face for other reasons, a lack of visage might indicate that the figure was of a sacred being. Again this is pure speculation, but judging from contemporary primordial cultures, it is a firm possibility. Most NeoPagans interpret the Venus as a Goddess figure. They place mythological symbolism onto the object regardless of the actual significance to the original sculptor and his or her people. In other words, NeoPagans invent significance to fit their own interpretations and theological (sic) needs, claiming that the value of a symbol is not so much its historical reality as its usefulness as a spiritual tool in the present. Starhawk, a well known NeoPagan leader and author, stated this succinctly in a letter to *The Atlantic Monthly*:

To us, Goddesses, Gods, and for that matter, archaeological theories are not something to believe in, nor are they merely metaphors. An image of deity, a symbol on a pot, a cave painting, a liturgy are more like portals to particular states of consciousness and constellations of energies . . . the heart of my connection to the Goddess has less to do with what I believe happened five thousand years ago or five hundred years ago, and much more to do with what I notice when I step outside my door: that oak leaves fall to the ground, decay and make fertile soil. (*Atlantic Monthly*, July 2001)

For many NeoPagans, objects and symbols have an immediate and intimate importance: they are mediums for spiritual enlightenment and living. Insofar as Starhawk is advocating a “comtemporization” of ancient and primordial images and

symbols for spiritual growth and practice in the present, she places NeoPaganism with post-modern “world-affirming religions” (Wallis) and human potential groups like est, TM, and Silva Mind Control, whose emphasis is on the present and its potential for spiritual growth and enlightenment. Images and symbols become not historically grounded objects of archeology but “portals to particular states of consciousness” as part of the spiritual transformational process. This perspective will come into focus again as we examine NeoPaganism with somewhat broader brush-strokes using a specific, and admittedly limited, set of characteristics that I hope nonetheless gives us the general idea and structure of the highly diverse and eclectic NeoPagan movement.

Many NeoPagans point to current primal peoples who have within their social structure a wise man or woman, or shaman, who travels to the otherworld to communicate with ancestors, calls by magic the game of the hunt, manipulates weather, settles disputes, and/or heals the sick and injured. These are the shamans many NeoPagans consider their progenitors, the first Witches. And it is in this general vein of magic-maker and healer that NeoPaganism finds its identity.

Gerald Gardner and Wiccan Revival

Near the other end of NeoPaganism’s basically mythological history is an English civil servant named Gerald Gardner. In 1950, a person claiming to be a witch could still be prosecuted in British courts under the Medieval Witchcraft Acts. In 1951, those laws were repealed and Gardner published a novel called *High Magic’s Aid* that many NeoPagans consider the opening salvo of the Pagan renaissance in Europe. Gardner went from fiction to factual books about “Wicca” and on to establishing, probably by mixing elements of older “Pagan” writings such as Charles Leland’s *Aradia* and Margaret Murray’s *Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, occult sources like Aleister Crowley, and

elements such as nudism, an actualized and dynamic religious practice that came to be known as “Paganism” and “Wicca”. Few NeoPagans would claim that Gardner was simply carrying on an already established and functioning, albeit underground, religious tradition, although some practitioners of “The Craft” will claim at least a Medieval lineage, but rather they will admit that Gardner took various elements of various lost traditions along with plenty of creativity and turned it into something uniquely twentieth century in character. This is not considered dishonest or inadequate unless hidden or denied because history, while excellent for forming a mythological structure, is not considered set in stone or so important, except for a few traditional and family Witch groups, that it must be recorded with complete accuracy. Unlike many Christians, NeoPagans do not generally pull the past into the present as an integral part of their theology or as absolute truth. NeoPagans do not so much reenact past sacred events or follow the example of past holy persons in order to maintain sacredness and holiness in the present, as draw from the past myths and stories for images, symbols, and practices that create experiential spiritual results in the present. In this way, Gardner represents a modification and a bringing-together of divergent and possibly non-Pagan elements from a mythological past to form a loosely organized, highly diverse, fiercely independent, individually-based, and eclectic entity which viewed together constitutes the self-identified group known as NeoPagans. In this way, they may be considered an NRM, just as a group that might recreate the Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses, based on all the evidence and record available, and worship them wholly within its reconstituted confines, would be considered an unusual and “new” spirituality, despite the fact that their deities are ancient, familiar, and wholly Western. Manifesting and living out an

archaic religious modality, mixed in with radically innovative and postmodern elements, certainly places NeoPaganism within the definition of NRMs.

NeoPaganism from a Typological-Phenomenological Perspective

My methodology for analyzing NeoPaganism, listing a set of general NeoPagan attributes, both religious and social, has obvious drawbacks, not the least of which is the difficulty of generalizing NeoPagans. One of the intrinsic realities of the movement is its internalized and institutionalized (if that word can even be properly used in this context) diversity and eclecticism. They have elevated decentralization to a sacrament and individuality to a sacred obligation. However, this list is, for the most part, accurate in describing the majority of NeoPagans, at least in my experience, and may serve as a starting place for further and more detailed analysis. As a New Religious Movement NeoPaganism is, I submit, the following: 1) non-dualistic, 2) world-accommodating, 3) non-eschatological, 4) non-violent, and 5) individualistic.

The NeoPagan (or “Contemporary Paganism” as Harvey calls it) movement is not generally dualistic; that is, NeoPagans do not separate the religious life from the physical, nor spirit from body. There is no sense, as in some NRMs, that this life, the Earth, the world of humankind, or our sensory existence and experiences is somehow evil, fallen, anti-spiritual or otherwise inferior. NeoPagans do not generally live in inner conflict with the world, caught between a religious belief system where the world is craven and a salvific spiritual path that leads away from the world to a better reality. For most NeoPagans, this world offers the primary avenue to spiritual advancement and maturation. Learning to integrate physical reality with spiritual reality is a prime objective during this life. Life is to be lived as fully as possible, emphasizing pleasure, ethical behavior, and growth; it is not to be escaped from. Though there is a strong sense

that the human spirit outlives the body and exists afterwards, there is little alienation between spiritual and material realms. This life is conceived as having purpose in the grander scheme of the spirit's existence and so is a legitimate part of a larger whole.

NeoPaganism also appears to be, in the main, a world-accommodating tradition. As Roy Wallis discusses in his essay "Three Types of New Religious Movements" (*Cults In Context*, 1998), the world-accommodating new spirituality "restores an experiential element to the spiritual life and thereby replaces lost certainties in a world where religious institutions have become increasingly relativized" (66). Since the second generation of NeoPagans is just now reaching maturity, most of the movement is made up of persons from other traditions that "discovered" the Pagan path and found connection to it. The number of ex-Catholics, Protestants, and Jews who complain of the lack of the "experiential element" in their birth religions is large, indeed. As a world-accommodating spirituality, NeoPaganism sees changes as necessary in the mainstream culture but also finds many aspects of that culture acceptable and even desirable. Endogenically, at least, there is little sense of conflict with the mainstream (since NeoPagans do not proselytize, that conflict usually comes from exogenous sources). The border between NeoPagans and the mainstream society is therefore highly porous.

As a non-eschatological spirituality, NeoPagans generally have little or no sense of an impending apocalyptic "end-time." The expectation is that, barring any natural or human-created disaster of global proportions, humankind will continue to exist and develop into the indefinite future, ending only when the sun dies in a fiery cataclysm billions of years hence. There is not, therefore, a sense of temporariness, of homelessness and urgency that otherworldly and apocalyptic religions experience. In addition, most

NeoPagans believe in a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth that allows for second, third, and, in fact, a potentially infinite number of chances if one's present life is unsatisfactory. NeoPagans do not feel that non-Pagans (or "cowens") are going to hell or some other punishment because no heaven, hell, or punishment is present in their theological structure. If eschatological religions propose a one-time linear birth-death-afterlife scenario, the implication is that a judgment occurs after this life where the soul is determined worthy or unworthy by the criteria of the eschatological religion. By contrast, NeoPagans, believing in a reincarnation-type circular return of the spirit – patterned on the cycles of nature – view life as part of a continuum of experience and growth.

One of the most widespread ethics in Neopaganism is that of non-violence. Since physicality is considered sacred with generally mild theological concerns, physical violence is forbidden, except in cases of self-defense. The *Wiccan Rede* serves as the Neopagan ethical axiom and is recognized by almost all Neopagan groups. It states that "If it harm none, do as you will," which is usually interpreted as a prohibition against physically "harming" other humans. Many NeoPagans consider violence at least spiritually immature and at most a sign of mental illness, a malady that should be dealt with firmly, though few advocate capital punishment, again citing the Rede.

Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony list three endogenous factors that they see as contributing to violence in NRMs: apocalypticism, charismatic leadership, and social encapsulation. As we have seen, the Neopagan movement is neither apocalyptic nor socially insulated. But what of the third? It seems possible, given the nature of most Neopagan leaders as larger-than-life that some charismaticism might be part of

NeoPagan groups, and certainly there are some leaders whose charisma is famous, even outside NeoPagan circles; however, each group and many individuals have *different* figures who they consider leader, and no one person so dominates the movement that they pose the threat Robbins and Anthony suggest.

Which leads us to the last characteristic I suggest is typical of NeoPaganism: individualism. The analogy of herding cats is common in describing the non-organizational character of the movement, implying that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to get NeoPagans to follow anyone or anything, or even to get them to all go in one direction. In fact, their decentralization, as pointed out at the beginning of this essay, is a point of almost sacerdotal pride. It is this dispersion of leadership loyalty and power that makes NeoPagans highly resistant to a centralized or hierarchical structure and promotes religious individuality and eclecticism. Even negative elements within a certain group are unlikely to spread to the movement as a whole because of this phenomenon. Since there is no central text, leader, or over-riding philosophy or orthopraxis – with the possible exception of the Goddess and the Wiccan Rede – diversity is not considered threatening to the movement and tyrannical features that have manifested in some NRMs that do conform more closely to Robbins and Anthony's model are uncommon. An argument could be made that NeoPaganism is as distant from the popular conception of "cult" as it is possible to be for a NRM. Only its newness in terms of its re-emergence or inception, depending on which view is taken, sets NeoPagans in conflict with the mainstream American society.

Mainstream Culture and NeoPagans

In fact, an argument could be made that the vast majority of conflict between NeoPagan groups and the mainstream culture is the result of exogenous rather than

endogenous factors. NeoPagans would argue that it is the mainstream culture's insistence on uniformity and its inability (or unwillingness) to accept diversity, in this case religious and moral diversity, that is the root cause of any problems that NeoPaganism experiences. Although there is something to be said for this argument, the fact is that many NeoPagans do seem to delight in contravening the majority religious and moral structure, and include within the canopy of "religious" many highly unorthodox behaviors and beliefs, including, for example, the use of psychotropics in their religious services and unusual sexual arrangements such as polyamory. Nor are all NeoPagan practices entirely benevolent, such as certain activities claimed to be from the "Old Religion" or some mythical ancient period that can be quite retributive and harmful. Add to this the NeoPagan habit of bickering incessantly among themselves, often resulting in derisive "witch wars," and a picture emerges of a group in an almost constant state of flux and internal metamorphosis. That NeoPaganism has not been effective in forwarding any of its religious interests, or even been able to emerge into visibility on the political or social radar, except as an occasional interest piece in the local newspaper around Halloween, indicates how problematic such decentralization and diversity can be. Nevertheless, in its acknowledgment of its drawbacks, weakness, and limitations as a religious group, NeoPaganism is undeniably an interesting member of the contemporary American NRM scene.

NeoPaganism as Represented by Margot Adler

One of the major literary works of NeoPaganism is Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon* (1986). At almost 600 pages, it is considered by many outside Paganism to be the definitive work on the subject, and by those inside the community as being one of two works, along with Starhawk's *Spiral Dance*, that enriched and enhanced the Pagan

renaissance during the 1980s. Adler's is usually considered the "masculine" book since she uses methodologies and language associated with intellectual scholasticism, while Starhawk's is the "feminine" book, heavily emphasizing relationships and feminist critique. In this case, we will use Adler to examine the three areas that are most interesting in terms of NeoPaganism's place in the broader study of contemporary spirituality: polytheism, feminism, and nature.

NeoPagan traditions are generally polytheistic, both in content and in form. In contrast to monotheism, most NeoPagans envision a God and Goddess in their rituals and stories. The universe, for instance, was not created by a single, masculine God through divine *fiat*; the Goddess through her mating with the God birthed it. The cosmos is the creative product of their love and fertility, not a solitary act of creation by an *uber*-father figure. The latter concept leaves out too much for NeoPagans; it ignores the feminine, sex, the body, and the dynamics of complementary energies in the world. They are both anthropocentric models, but one is far richer and more inclusive.

The Goddess does not represent just women but feminine energy, which both women and men can have in degrees. The same holds for the God. His energy is present in different amounts in both males and females. The Pagan concept of feminine and masculine energies includes the traditional attributes, but those attributes are available and present in both sexes. Feminine energy is considered nurturing, accommodating, receptive, intuitive, circular, compassionate, and relational and is connected to the moon and night, while masculine energy is thought of as assertive, unbending, warrior-like, intellectual, concrete, linear, and idealistic and is connected with the sun and day. So it is possible, even desirable, for Pagans of both sexes to cultivate both energies within the

self in as equal a balance as possible. Thus is a person considered most *whole* when these energies are both present and honored.

But polytheism is more than just two (or more) divinities and their representative energies. It has, as a religious philosophy and worldview, consequences that affect Paganism's entire essence and has implications for the critique and future of spirituality in general. As Adler puts it:

Many Pagans will tell you that polytheism is an *attitude* and a *perspective* that affect more than what we consider spirituality. They might well say that the constant calls for unity, integration, and homogenization in the Western world derive from our long-standing ideology of monotheism, which remains the majority tradition in the West. (24)

Adler adds that most Pagans regard monotheism as a “political and psychological ideology” as well as a religious characteristic. Thus we see that Paganism provides an important critique of not only monotheistic religions but also what might be termed the monistic mindset that attempts to make everything and everyone the same. Paganism does this by virtue of its *polytheistic ethos* and because it is *outside* the monotheistic community looking in with a critical eye.

This is why it is possible and common for Pagans to be intimately involved with more than one religion in addition to Paganism. There is little or no sense of competition for the soul, no demands for loyalty to one tradition, no exclusivism and its attendant superiority complex. The world is not, as the cliché goes, black and white. It is a rainbow. Diversity is not just tolerated, it is a religious tenet to be encouraged and celebrated. This affects how Pagans view the world: if your spirituality honors diversity, that outlook usually carries over into other areas of life. Pagans are usually at the liberal/progressive end of the political spectrum, but they will usually defend the rights of others to be at the opposite end of that spectrum. In fact, the Green Party model of

“being neither left nor right, but ahead” is one greatly favored by Pagans. As Adler puts it “The idea of polytheism is grounded in the view that reality (divine or otherwise) is multiple and diverse” and so has allowed “a multiple of distinct groups to exist more or less in harmony despite great divergence in beliefs and practices . . .” (25). Consider how such an ethic of tolerant diversity might affect, if widely adopted, the myriad of social, political, and religious conflicts occurring in the world. The implication of the spread of this ethic is inspiring and potentially healing.

In addition to being polytheistic, Paganism has a strong and vital feminist element. By virtue of having a God and Goddess of equal importance, feminine energy and women are more than just represented, they are integral. A feminist critique of male-dominant symbolism and orientation is as central to Paganism as the polytheistic critique of monotheism, for historically they have often seemed to go hand in hand.

In one sense, feminism is an integral and inseparable part of the postmodern NeoPagan movement. If your deities are both male and female, and if they are of equal status, then this reflects on and helps reinforce the values of the community. Both women and feminine energy are honored as being inseparable and immanent in a healthy human and in the world at large. As we saw in the work of Ruether much of the environmental crisis, for instance, is considered a struggle between the unhealthy domination of masculine energy over feminine energy. Women and men work together in most covens and groups to cultivate this balanced energy, but exclusively feminist groups have also flourished where women nourish their particular energies and struggles apart from mainstream Paganism. In these groups the struggles in the political realm are

combined with Goddess spirituality to produce a unique hybrid of considerable power.

As Adler records,

Most feminist Witches feel the spiritual and political can be combined. They are moving toward a position that would, in the words of Z Budapest, ‘fight for our sweet woman souls’ as well as our bodies. (186)

The integration of spirituality and political activism is hardly unique to NeoPaganism, but its gender balance and the presence of the Goddess does place it in a uniquely influential position to support the women’s movement with religious fervor and spiritual valuation. The Goddess is a powerful symbol (and, some would say, reality) that can be remembered from the past and manifested in the present, as well as an archetype that informs the worship of both women and men. Combined with polytheism, Adler concludes:

All would agree that it is essential to reclaim from the ruins, to create, dream again, and restore the power of the thousands of ancient goddesses that informed a multitude of ancient cultures. These powerful figures are models of our own becoming. As we understand their strengths, we can more easily claim them as our own. (228-229)

Non-patriarchal images of the divine become powerful allies in the present for revisioning female strength and independence and for feminine energies in spirituality and worship. These, in turn, affect the wider political context in which the vision and spirit is set. The implications of NeoPaganism’s strong feminist element to the study of spirituality include widening the scope of study, much as Judith Plaskow’s *Standing Again At Sinai*, to include the feminine, a fairly radical proposition given the deeply entrenched masculinity and male dominance of most world religions.

Lastly, NeoPaganism is *naturocentric*. That is, Pagans begin with the proposition that nature is sacred and go from there. Nature includes humans, but more importantly it includes the nonhuman Earth. The planet is a whole, or more accurately, a *holon*

(simultaneously a whole and part of a greater whole), and as we noted, this reality found expression through the work of Lovelock and Margulis as *Gaia*. Earth as Gaia is conceived of as a single organism, of which humans and all of nature are a part.

Depending on who you speak to, Gaia is either independently conscious or humans serve as Her consciousness. Either way, She is alive and awake, so the honoring and protection of nature is done to a *being*. This both sacralizes and enlivens Earth-worship, whose object is not dead in the materialistic model or simply a discreet divinity apart from humankind and nature. These become intertwined and intimate in a way not possible when “God” is separate and isolated as a spiritual entity in “heaven.” Adler quotes at length from Oberon Zell, founder of the Church of All Worlds on this subject, for CAW has been an outspoken advocate of “Gaea” (his spelling for Earth as a conscious metabeing):

The ultimate potential of Gaea was the telepathic unity of consciousness between all parts of the [planetary] nervous system, between all human beings, and, ultimately, between all living creatures. Evolution to such a point would be similar to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s emerging planetary consciousness, the “Omega Point,” although without Teilhard’s Christian trappings. (301)

Earth Seasons: Pagan Calendar and Environmentalism

Such a connection to Earth is not exclusively intellectual, of course, but is also emotional and experiential. Pagans *feel* and *sense* a connection to nature that cannot be easily or quickly communicated or taught to others. This connection is based on empathy, a sense of compassionate oneness and communion with nature, an interface between ourselves as humans and the rest of the world. If it can be taught, it might be through the active and involved observance and celebration of Earth’s seasons. These are the holy days of the Pagan calendar, the Sabbats that mark a continued covenant with our home planet and its annual course around its home star. In effect, Sabbats constitute a

yearlong spiritual meditation strengthening the bonds with our bodies, our fellows, and the earth. The “wheel of the year” functions as a great magical tool for the purpose of connecting us with Earth.

The Eight celebratory days are: Yule (Winter Solstice); Imbolc (MidWinter); Ostara (Spring Equinox); Beltane (Mid Spring); Litha (Summer Solstice); Lughnasad (Mid Summer); Mabon (Autumn Equinox); and Samhain (Mid Autumn). These holy days are not based on a person or human event. They are directly connected to the earth’s seasons and the changes throughout the year.

It should not be surprising, then, that Pagans are usually avid environmentalists. When your concept of Earth is closely tied to your concept of divinity in the form of a Goddess, “Mother Earth” becomes much more than a cliché; it has real power. When Pagans speak of ecology, the study of our “home place,” there is a sense of sacred connection, communion, and covenant with nature. The trees and forests, deserts and mountains, soil and sky – all are holy. Such a belief system stands in direct opposition to the dichotomy that Western civilization and its Judeo-Christian religious traditions have postulated. Ecology, then, is a sacred study and an emotional bond promulgated by spiritual praxis and a deep empathetic response.

These three areas: polytheism, feminism, and nature, mark the unique boundaries between the NeoPagan movement and the mainstream culture that can often be suspicious and even fearful of Witches. If Earth is a living being, then we are responsible for Her just as She sustains us, and we can no longer live on Her as if we could exploit natural resources indefinitely and at our whim. We must live *with* Her, maturing as planetary citizens and living ecologically. An ascetic God dwelling in a heaven, safely

out of the way, and an Earth that is nothing more than a temporary “veil of tears” on the true spiritual path to heaven or hell is a structure destined to create human suffering, for until we break out of the cycles and dependence on nature, as the earth goes, so we go. This is the core of ecospiritual ethics and, along with the restoration of feminine energy and polytheistic tolerance, forms the core of NeoPaganism.

NeoPaganism as Represented by George Chryssides

In *Exploring New Religions* (1999), George Chryssides writes on several topics regarding cults and NRMs. His own adopted approach to the subject is what he describes as a “broadly phenomenological one, in which I have aimed at empathetic . . . understanding,” the same method employed by this author (3). Of particular interest is Chapter 9: “New Age, Witchcraft and Paganism.”

Chryssides makes several points that are important in the development of NeoPaganism as a prime example of the spirituality / nature synthesis, especially the influence of the New Age movement and the importance of naturocentrism. The New Age is an integral part of and seminal to the contemporary formation of NeoPaganism. In fact, NeoPaganism is a hybrid of ancient mythologies and contemporary New Age ethics and structure, including the New Age attitudes towards individual selfhood. As Chryssides notes,

One typical feature of the New Age is a positive, indeed optimistic, view of the self. The self is certainly not to be disparaged, as in Calvinist doctrines of original sin. Far from being sinful and ‘totally depraved’, the self is even regarded by some New Agers as divine.” (317)

In the NeoPagan Church of All Worlds, the seminal saying, which is used among members as a greeting and libation, is “Thou are God” and “Thou art Goddess.” This is indicative of the general NeoPagan belief that divinity is immanent as well as, or

sometimes rather than, transcendent. NeoPagans, like New Agers, experience the divine within the material realm as well as in the “spiritual” realm. The “self” includes physical as well as spiritual. God/dess is in-dwelling, if perceived as separate at all, truly alive within the “temple” of the individual person. We are, in effect, divine beings. This conflation of body and soul has important implications in the spirituality / nature synthesis. If body and soul are equally spiritual, no denial of the physical self or the material world is required for a full spiritual life. The suffering and groundedness of the body is answered by the belief that all our experiences, including that of suffering, are integral to spiritual experience and growth. The world of flesh is not a test to see if we can learn to wholly transcend it but a learning reality that contributes to spiritual maturation.

Several other New Age ideas are inseparable from many NeoPagan traditions; for instance, the famous love of diversity common in the NeoPagan community has as its original inspiration the New Age ethic of coexistence, which values differences as adding to the richness of culture and individual experience. So, while Chryssides quotes Shirley MacLaine saying “I am god, I am god, I am god”, he continues by reminding us that

This does not mean that all human beings are perfect, but rather that they have potential, and should strive for their optimal state of well-being. It also implies that human beings are to be valued for what they are, whether they are male or female, black or white, straight or gay” (317)

As we already noted, this sense of tolerance and inclusion spills over into the area of religious multiplicity. At least in Western cultures, religion has so commonly been associated with absolute exclusivity that one which believes in multiple simultaneous religious practices is startling, even disturbing. Yet there is nothing inherent about religious exclusivity in affiliation except for a long history of jealousy and sectarian

conflict, and these are hardly recommendations. I submit that it is because of the influence of New Age ideals of diversity that NeoPaganism holds such an ecumenical attitude, and why it presents this attitude as a religious virtue. “Human beings,” in short, “are to be valued for what they are . . .” Indeed, all humans are considered radically equal with no considerations except ethical ones (mostly violence vs. nonviolence) and so NeoPagans generally hold as a sign of spiritual maturity the acceptance of difference and diversity in humankind. Perhaps since NeoPaganism possesses no judgmental God or strict exclusivism, there is less need for judging or excluding others from valuation.

In addition, Chryssides states that the New Age “has no formal institutional structure” (316). That is, there is no central authority or organized structural form. Communication and “organization” is by networking - loose, informal association and mutual sharing of ideas - and so the power of the New Age movement is in its ideas and results, not in a formal hierarchy that holds power and corrects deviance. In the same way, NeoPaganism has no central authority, no main headquarters, and no single sacred text. It is held together by mutual recognition and self-identification, the barest minimum of common beliefs, practices, and symbols, and by the ideals, even the “spirit”, of the Pagan path. For in both the New Age and NeoPagan worlds, “spirit” can be an important ideal and motivation.

But it is spirit in a new and radical form. The structure is more relaxed, the methods more eclectic, the boundaries more porous. NeoPagans would claim there has been a shift from world-denying spirituality to world-affirming spirituality. In the past, one left the world, abandoned ‘worldliness’ in order to enter into spirit. Monasticism was the ultimate spiritual life. But now world and spirit are reintroduced to each other, via

Paganism, spurred by the growing awareness of Earth as a living sphere, the resulting environmentalism, and the ethic that finds increasing value in individual human beings, not for how they can conform to a central authority or creed, but as unique entities in an increasingly diverse, even global, context. The New Age expresses this concern for the unique human person in terms of “empowerment” and “human potential” (318) and ecological awareness through alternative spirituality and the world-affirming evolutionary spirituality of Teilhard de Chardin. NeoPaganism partakes in both these, seeking personal empowerment through magical rituals and workings and ecological awareness through celebrations of the seasons and the veneration of Earth deities like Pan, the Green Man, and the Goddess Herself, who is nothing if not the ultimate expression of “Mother Earth.”

It is no longer necessary to turn one’s back on the world, on the physical body or the rest of nature, in order to experience the spirit; it can be experienced *through* nature and the world, and thus human limitation is challenged, the ultimate goal being the overcoming of those limitations through an expansion of the human self to the divine through nature. NeoPaganism seeks this exact goal, through the celebration of the cycles of nature and the deeper meanings in our lives through the fulfillment of each person’s inner potential. The ideal is to reach both beyond the self and deeply into the self, and to reach both beyond nature and deeply into nature, each reflecting the other both as metaphor and solid reality.

NeoPaganism as a Synthesis of Spirituality and Nature

NeoPaganism has a direct religious and spiritual connection to the natural world and considers that world, including the human body, to be sacred (that is, connected to the divine and worthy of special spiritual and religious attention and veneration). There

are several forms this sacredness takes. For instance, the Sabbats or holy days of celebration and ritual fall on the solstices, equinoxes, and cross-quarters in accordance with the movement of the planet and the resulting changes in seasons. Each season represents metaphorically and in actual physicality certain values, orientations, myths, life passages, and practices. Yule, the first day of winter, for example, represents renewal and rebirth since from this day forward the days become longer and the night shorter; warmth, and thus growth of plants and animals, increases and the continuation of life is celebrated. Along with rebirth and renewal, the light of the sun becomes stronger in the Northern Hemisphere, and so light becomes associated with Yule. This opens up more related and complementary symbols and metaphors, including the special attention given to birth, birth mothers, and infants many NeoPagans celebrate at this time of year. The combination of the rebirth of hope and the return of the precious, life-giving light of the sun is reflected in other traditions that have holy days near the solstice, including Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa.

Another example of NeoPaganism's deep connection with a sacred nature is the common tradition of worshipping *skyclad*. The human body is considered a sacred part of a sacralized natural world, and so there is no restriction against nakedness; in fact, the widely used and respected "Charge of the Goddess" specifically instructs the coven, the basic unit in Wicca, to be free, "and as a sign that ye be truly free, ye shall be naked in your rites." Nature is sacred, and the body is part of nature, therefore the body is also sacred. This point alone separates off those spiritualities that seek to escape from nature, and thus the body, from those few that embrace nature and thus the body. The former erect restrictions against viewing or exposing the body, even to punishing nakedness, and

hold as immoral the body and many of its functions. For many NeoPagans, this is nothing short of absurd. Such a de-sacralization is considered at least faulty and at most dangerous and unhealthy. Since humans are still dependent on Earth for life and health, ecological sustenance is considered a highly moral act, and since Earth is often considered the living body of Gaea the (the Mother Earth Goddess) protecting the Earth is no less than a religious obligation. It may come as no surprise, then, that some NeoPagans regard supposedly civil laws prohibiting nudity as a breaching of their First Amendment religious rights.

It is in these ways that NeoPaganism constitutes a synthesis of spirituality and nature: the individual self is divine, and divinity is therefore immanent in the self. Divinity is not only immanent in the self, She is also indwelling in the world, and so the world itself is divine, a sacred source of experiences that contribute to spiritual maturation. The self and world partake in the divine and are therefore sacred. In this way a deep connection is made, or perhaps re-made since many NeoPagans consider the spirit-body split to be a result of gradual adaptation of error. That erroneous split has caused untold misery and conflict, unnecessary and unjust, and those who support the continuation of this destructive dichotomy will be held responsible, not by a divine being, but by future generations who may pay a heavy price for the short-sighted immaturity of the present.

Therefore, NeoPaganism is a contemporary religious tradition, greatly influenced by the New Age movement, sharing many of its values, beliefs, assumptions, and ethics, but adding a unique spiritual element that generally regards nature, including the human body, as sacred and worthy of veneration. It is not exclusively physical, but sees the

challenges of life in this world to be important lessons on the road to spiritual maturity. It further seeks communion with inner and outer forces in a variety of names and interpretations, most often personified as God and/or Goddess. It revels in diversity and honors all paths as valid for those who follow them. It is, in other words, a very different expression of spirituality, one that has been ignored and/or devalued for millennia, but whose renaissance coincides with an increasing awareness of the environmental impact of humans on Earth and the need for a closer, empathetic, and unabashedly restructured relationship amongst all the inhabitants of Earth.

Three NeoPagan Groups

Let us look at three specific NeoPagan groups. Each partakes in the whole of the community but also offers unique qualities. They share in common most of the characteristics we have described, but also display other attributes that highlight particular manifestations of NeoPaganism.

Church of All Worlds

The Church of All Worlds, being the first Earth-centered tradition to federally incorporate in the United States, opened the doors for the end to strict isolationism within NeoPagan ranks. Some traditions voluntarily maintain their secrecy, but many have subsequently “come out of the broom closet.” CAW published *Green Egg*, still the flagship NeoPagan magazine that helped identify far-flung groups and give them a sense of shared religious identity. Recognition is something the NeoPagan community lacked until the early 1970s when CAW helped forge NeoPaganism as it has developed to the present.

Incorporation as a federally-recognized tax-exempt non-profit organization by CAW also introduced Earth-based religions to the federal government, and by granting

non-profit status, the government gave tacit recognition to American NeoPaganism. Although problems of legal and illegal discrimination still exist for NeoPagans, they are generally localized and isolated. Most legal cases which can be proved as discrimination based on religion have been won by NeoPagan plaintiffs, and the various NeoPagan and Witches' defense leagues and organizations are consistently widening the sphere of legal tolerance.

The science fiction novel *Stranger In a Strange Land*, one of Robert Heinlein's more visionary works, originally influenced CAW. In it a young man raised by Martians returns to Earth as a messiah figure with certain "miraculous" abilities and establishes a church called the Church of All Worlds. The disciples he gathers around him live in alternative and unconventional ways, including multiple marriages and group sexuality. The real-life CAW follows many of the book's examples and therefore challenges, by its nature, the morals of the dominant culture. Polyamorism, or intimate fidelity to more than one partner, is an especially common trait in the membership. These alternatives are regarded as being futurist because CAWers believe that society is generally moving in the direction of more liberal mores and progressive attitudes that they already live as part of their religious commitment. There is a sense in CAW, then, of progression from the dominance of what they consider Christian attitudes and restrictions to the freedom of individual choice. This is considered a spiritual progression based on the work of self-actualization through certain rituals and practices.

Circle Network

The group known as Circle, on the other hand, is fairly conventional in its morals, focuses instead on acquiring land and performing rituals on it. To own land is considered as a restoration of a small piece of nature to its rightful place in the naturocentric scheme

of the universe wherein nature is seen as an Earth-mother being of which humans are one part. It is not only a symbolic holding of the Earth in benevolent stewardship but a way to tap into the healing and empowering energy of the planet. It is also a way to insulate the community in its rituals from the disapproval and even hostility of the outside, “mundane” society.

The healing aspect of communion with the earth is also important in Circle. The founder of Circle Network, Selena Fox, is a counselor and healer, and much of the work of the group is in this vein: to help heal themselves and others in a process that is considered sacred service to the Goddess, the expression of the feminine aspect of divinity, and a reflection of the benevolent spirit of Earth nurturing us as a species. Healing is both physical and mental, involving home grown medicinal herbs as well as psychological work. The connection between the land and healing nurturance is strong, and is wonderfully symbolized in rituals where participants join hands in a large circle of life. They say that to heal the earth and our relationship to Her, we ourselves must be healed.

Reclaiming

Finally, Starhawk’s group Reclaiming expresses the activist orientation of many NeoPagans. Rather than centering on a private landstead, Reclaiming acts in the world of society and politics to try and encourage NeoPagan values and represent NeoPagan issues. Spiritual activism takes its cues from Gandhi and King, in its nonviolence and commitment to persuasion by moral example and responsible dedication.

Traditionally, minority groups, including religious minorities, must pass through a period of activism in order to secure equal rights and freedoms. Starhawk advocates such activities in the public forum and has been involved in several actions herself, some of

which involved serving jail time. They're activities may be in the form of protests against something or the support of others. They can also be proactive, such as cleaning streams, picking up trash, and holding recycling drives. These are practical acts, rather than just the advocating of ideas, and they reflect Reclaiming's hands-on approach to cultural transformation.

Reclaiming also sponsors public rituals in public spaces. In line with their activist orientation, one may find them celebrating seasonal Sabbats in parks and plazas across the country where everyone is invited and where a festive atmosphere is created. This allows non-NeoPagans to see and speak with NeoPagans, dispelling doubts and misunderstandings, and it creates a space where NeoPagans can meet and network, reducing their isolation. This is considered service to the Goddess, and it also provides exposure for the NeoPagan community and NeoPagan ideas and practices that are considered important to share with the greater society in which NeoPagans find themselves.

Similarities among the Three Groups

Each of these three groups both reflects the general NeoPagan tradition and describes an area of unique emphasis. They are all different, but all identify themselves as NeoPagan and see themselves as part of a greater religious and spiritual community. The commitment to unity in diversity creates an atmosphere characterized more by cooperation than conflict, and many times the entire NeoPagan population of a region will gather at large convocations or gatherings to celebrate together, honoring what is different and what is the same between them in ways that might be emulated by other religions to the benefit of the world. In CAW's futurism and moral diversity; in Circle's love of the land and healing arts; in Reclaiming's political activism and outreach

orientation; in all of these we see facets of NeoPaganism and its unique contribution to the ongoing religious and spiritual dialogue.

The synthesis of spirituality and nature forms the foundation for each of these groups. It is reflected in their ownership, restoration, and nurturance of land, in the holding of religious service outside, whenever possible, among the elements, and in the conception of an Earth Mother Goddess often associated with Earth as a whole. NeoPagans serve as a dynamic example of how religious philosophy and activism combine with ecology and environmentalism to create a synthesis of power and grace, for the individual adherents and the culture at large.

NeoPaganism as Represented by James Lewis and Associates

Finally, we turn to the scholarly collection of essays, *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* (1996) edited by James Lewis. This book represents, along with Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon*, an academically rigorous explication of NeoPaganism. It is a thoughtful collection, containing both "observations of detached outsiders" and what Lewis calls "poetic theology." It is also a work emphasizing *theory* over *method*, but as a whole it attempts to be balanced and to competently represent the contemporary NeoPagan movement. Of interest to us are those essays speaking to the juncture of spirituality and nature.

In the Introduction by Lewis, which begins with a quote from Starhawk, NeoPaganism's sacred connection to nature and the earth is mentioned several times. The Old Religion, as it is often called, is "conceived as heartfelt worship of the Goddess and respect for the Earth as her principal embodiment" (1). NeoPaganism, in its form as a reconstruction of older pagan traditions, is conceived as a contemporary religion whose main focus of worship is a feminine deity, the manifestation of which is not a burning

bush or still small voice, but the whole planet. It takes no disciplined effort, spiritual practice, or special training to possess intimate gnosis of the Goddess; we are in Her midst, and insofar as we are part of Earth, we are also a part of and one with Her. The age-old duality of material and spiritual realms does not exist. Nature is sacred and the environment sacerdotal in a synthesis whose effect on religious discourse has yet to be widely felt.

One reason for this lack of impact on the greater culture, according to Lewis, is a deep-seated prejudice on the part of academia against anything “occult.” Those scholars who study it must endure the “disdain of their colleagues” (2). Yet it could be argued that NeoPagan beliefs and practices are no more “occult” than bread and wine becoming flesh and blood or the mysteries of a virgin birth. The fact is, NeoPaganism is *different*. It is distant enough in form and content from the “great religions” with which scholars are comfortably familiar to cause “disdain.”

Judy Harrow

The first essay of *Magical Religion* is Judy Harrow’s “The Contemporary NeoPagan Revival,” which serves as a general introduction to the major themes of the field. It is overtly political, and in discussing the dangers of fascism and extreme nationalism, she identifies the ecological underpinning and locus in NeoPaganism in a typically personal statement:

I experience the Earth as one living organism, and I call her my Holy Mother. But I also know that very local and grassroots activities are the best ways to take care of ourselves and to protect her. (16)

The first sentence is an initially stunning theological statement: that on the deepest individual level, where even the largest ‘great religions’ are sustained and given reality, the generally common experience for many NeoPagans is that of the planet as a single

living entity. The implication is that of *relationship* and that just as ethical and moral behavior towards other humans constitutes a central praxis in religion, so do we have a similar relational obligation towards Earth. The spread of such a moral kinship raises important questions about our current relationship to the planet and, ultimately, to our own religious selves. Harrow's statement gives us part of the answer. First, she recognizes that not only do we have an interdependent relationship with Earth but also that Earth is itself a form of the deity, that it is the body of the Goddess. There is not much *body* in many religions; their passions and energies are focused on a *disembodied* spirituality and afterlife. To locate divinity in nature and in the form of the planet itself is to radically shift the distribution of holiness, sacredness, and religious passion.

In the second sentence, Harrow places the activity of such a transformation in the realm of daily human lives and society. These concepts are not only philosophical propositions, they are the stuff of activism. With the larger cultural influence from without and the machinations of politics from within, the social action that grows out of this shift in spiritual consciousness is the engine that powers the transformation to a more Earth-friendly humanity. Earth activism of this kind emerges out of an expansion of ethics from the human-human relationship to include the human-earth relationship. Such is Harrow's way out of our seemingly self-destructive dilemma: a new kinship with a spiritualized Earth.

The Zells

One of the most important essays for this thesis, and in fact in the whole NeoPagan movement, is Otter (now Oberon) and Morning Glory Zell's "Who on Earth is the Goddess?" (1978). This essay expresses most directly the notion of "heartfelt worship of the Goddess and respect for the Earth as her principal embodiment." For our purposes, it

is not only the content, which we will look at in a moment, but also the form that is of interest. The Zell essay is on one end of *Magical Religion*'s spectrum, what Lewis calls "poetic theology." In the mytho-poetic tradition, imagery, symbolism, linguistic emotiveness, and beauty are characteristic elements in a process involving the "heart," not just the mind. It is not so much an intellectual explication as a series of poetically expressed relationships cloaked in familiar mythological sentiments and language. For instance, referring to Mother Earth, the Zells write that "The moon is her radiant heart, and in the tides beats the pulse of her blood" (28). This kind of imagery is so prevalent in NeoPaganism that it represents a common template of thought and a method of perceiving the subject of religion and ecology that must be accepted to fully comprehend the NeoPagan worldview.

The Zell essay further defines the primary symbol of Earth Mother and the primary relationship of humans to "her." The connection between the Earth as a physical entity, that is, a planet with life on it, and the Mother as a divine entity, that is, the Goddess, is inescapable. This connection is an interior state in most NeoPagans and is integral to the Pagan character. For many NeoPagans, the Earth Mother Goddess is not just a symbol of that connection; she is an actual external reality whose manifestation is Earth itself and all that Earth encompasses, including humankind, and as an external reality aids in the formation of the divine Earth-human connection. 'Religion' has for so long been defined by worship of a deity or deities separate from nature that animistic or pantheistic nature-worship has been relegated to 'primitive' (implying inferior) traditions.

NeoPaganism represents a challenge to preconceived notions about the nature of religion. The Goddess is nature incarnate, observable in every sunset, under every

microscope, and through every set of eyes. This is not only a thought, it is a feeling. The Great Goddess, for the Zells and many NeoPagans, is the “universal feminine spirit of nature” and Earth a “living organism,” a Whole that not only has life on it, but is itself a single living entity and a singular being (26). These simultaneous realities are expressed in what the Zells call the “Gaea Thesis.” This theory of the unity of all Terran life relies on primalgenesis evolution and posits humans as an evolutionary stage in the continuing saga of Earth-life originating with the first organisms in a ‘primeval soup.’ If we do originate in a common genetic pool, then we share profound commonalties with all of nature. If cells began to divide at the dawn of time then the analogy is with this basic biological event on the cellular level:

no matter how many times a cell fissions in the process of embryological development, all the daughter cells collectively continue to comprise but one single organism. All life on Earth comprises the body of a single vast living being - Mother Earth herself . . . and the soul of our planetary biosphere is she whom we call Goddess. (28)

In other words, humans are mostly unconscious members of the greater Earth being just as cells are unconscious members of our greater bodies. Because we are not aware of it does not make it untrue. A scientific, physical basis is used for the connection of material phenomena such as cellular fission to the multiple oneness of Earth, and the microcosm serves as a metaphor for the macrocosm, and vice versa.

The idea of a conscious planetary being that is called Gaia, Gaea, or the Goddess is more fully developed in Zell’s essay “Theagenesis” (*Green Egg*, 1971). In it, the idea is explicated of a global consciousness of which humankind is one (admittedly important) part and with which humans can connect to form a “telepathic unity.” He first claims that among ancient tribal peoples – i.e. pagans – there were certain intuitively sensed insights, among them that of “humanity being a microcosm corresponding to the macrocosm of all

Nature.” This fundamental idea – that humans are tiny mirrors of the whole of nature – is supported by the scientific knowledge that everything is made up of subatomic particles, atoms, and molecules – humans as well as all nature. Such a common structure beneath all material reality suggests a unity of all Earth-life. Zell uses this scientific knowledge as a verification of the early pagan insight into and belief in just such a global unity.

These insights, however, were largely intuitive, as science had not yet progressed to the point of being able to provide objective validation for what must have seemed, to outsiders, to be mere superstition. Twentieth-century Neo-Paganism, however, has applied itself and the science of its era to that validation, and has discovered astounding implications. (Green Egg, 1971)

The contemporary NeoPagan study of the fundamental biological unity of all life leads to an inference: that the living organism of humans is analogous to the living organism of Earth. Just as the human body has cells, so Earth has equivalent component parts, which make up its whole. As the myriad different cells in the human body constitute a single organism, so the different components of Gaea constitute a single “planetary biosphere.”

But where does Gaea as a *conscious* organism come in? What makes Earth a *being*? Returning to the comparison of Earth and body, Zell postulates:

Just as in the human body the brain and nervous system is the last organ to develop, so in Gaea the last biome to develop is the Noosphere, composed of Earth's aggregate population of Homo Sapiens. (1971)

Therefore, it is humankind that serves the unique purpose of being the “brain and nervous system” of Earth’s body. To support this hypothesis, he quotes James Lovelock from a 1975 article in New Scientist:

‘In man,’ says Lovelock, ‘Gaia has the equivalent of a central nervous system and an awareness of herself and the rest of the Universe. Through man, she has a rudimentary capacity, capable of development, to anticipate and guard against threats to her existence. For example, man can command just about enough capacity to ward off a collision with a planetoid the size of Icarus. Can it then be

that in the course of man's evolution within Gaia he has been acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure her survival?' ("The Quest for Gaia, *New Scientist*, Feb. 6, 1975)

Zell later adds that this function may in fact belong to the great whales, and that the important human function is that of reproduction. Insofar as we seed other planets, *homo sapiens* can be viewed in this capacity. Either way, humankind has a place in the conscious ecobeing of Earth and a role in Earth's "awakening." That is, Gaea, while being "conscious" in the sense of a self-aware being, is "unconscious" in the sense that she is sleeping.

. . . yet unawakened, the slumbering subconscious [and dreaming?] mind of Gaea is experienced intuitively by us all, and has been referred to instinctively by us as Mother Earth, Mother Nature - The Goddess for whom She is well named. (1971)

From conscious being we move to unconscious deity, the Goddess of NeoPagan "thealogy." This is one path taken by one NeoPagan figure from Earth as a dead object to Earth as the Goddess, a divine being worthy of veneration and a fitting reality around which to form a spiritual tradition.

So the "telepathic unity of consciousness between all parts of the [planetary] nervous system" now makes more sense. The discoveries and interpretive language of science, in addition to feminism, pantheism, and ecology, constitute a distinct theological (sic) system. The feminist critique of Rosemary Ruether, the pantheism of Thomas Berry, and the environmental activism of Earth First! combine into an ethos that segues into the final part of the Zell essay: *advocacy*. Although NeoPaganism is generally not an evangelizing or proselytizing religion, neither is it passive. It is active, not in an attempt to gain converts, but in living and sharing its vision and environmental ethics. In the section of the essay entitled "Earth Mother, your children are here!" the Zells advocate their position as a general cultural revolution. Repeating the mantra of

“environmental crisis,” they propose a profound identification with nature and the planetary meta-being, what might be called *Earth empathy*:

The only thing that can save us is a total and electrifying change of consciousness. Nothing short of a worldwide realization of our planetary situation will bring home the desperation of our plight. We must activate our Gaeian identification so that we regain our shattered empathy with the Spirit of Nature. We must become one with the Earth Mother in order to feel her pain/our pain and make it stop before the cancer we have become reaches the terminal stage. (1971)

The Zells are not only diagnosing the problem, they are offering a prescriptive solution. Note the apocalyptic urgency, the sense of there being a wrongness in the world and in us requiring ‘salvation’ and the underlying optimism that by writing the prescription the patient can be persuaded to take the medicine and get well. And the medicine is potent: “nothing short of a worldwide realization.” Such global enlightenment to “our planetary situation” is ostensibly the job of the NeoPagan movement, within its proselytizing limitations. By anthropomorphizing the planet and associating it with the ancient Mother Goddess figure, NeoPaganism combines powerful elements - spirit and nature - in order to produce a reverence for the environment capable of overcoming shortsightedness and propelling humanity into a new state of consciousness resulting in an ethic of co-existence with that environment. As the Zells put it:

The Gaeian movement is presently small and unrecognized . . . but it has tremendous potential in . . . presenting an answer to so many of the world’s problems. Its vision is, in fact, an idea whose time has come. (1971)

If the Zells are not evangelists, they are at least “advocates”. This is the general stance most NeoPagans take, including this author. We wish to disseminate our values and positions, but do not regard them as the One True Way. The implication of this global

being, this divine Earth Goddess, is that NeoPaganism is situated to influence people's feelings about, and thus relationship to, the environment.

Dennis Carpenter

In the *Magical Religion* essay by Dennis Carpenter on “Emergent Nature Spirituality,” the author continues the theme of Earth as the body of a physical and spiritual meta-being. He begins exploring the “deification of nature” by pointing out the centrality in NeoPaganism of interrelationships (64). Postmodern spirituality is characterized by what Starhawk describes as “the understanding that all being is interrelated, that we are linked with all of the cosmos as parts of one living organism. What affects one of us affects us all.”

[Selena] Fox offered a similar viewpoint when she said ‘Mother Earth is the Goddess of planet Earth. She is the Ecosphere, the totality of all lifeforms and substance here. She is the web of life of this world.’ (50)

Such a radical connection between humanity, Earth, and divinity is not present in the tenets of any other religious tradition outside of NeoPaganism. Even native traditions limit their cosmology to immediately observable natural surroundings and sky because the photographs of the planet as a pearl-blue opal in space are recent images that NeoPaganism has embraced as theologically significant. Carpenter relates the sense of interconnectedness in these exact Postmodernist terms:

While the capability of viewing Earth from space is made possible by modern technology, the impact such images have had may be regarded as post-modern in the manner in which they have helped shift human perception away from the notion of individual separateness and toward the notion of the planet as an interconnected whole within the vastness of space. (55)

Such an intimate yet cosmic interrelationship between all life is reflected in the NeoPagan chant: “We are the flow, We are the ebb, We are the weaver, We are the web.” A sense of being in the web of the planetary system, and by extension the

universe, is a profound Postmodern religious worldview. Simply put, “. . . closely related to the theme of immanence, Pagans view all of Nature as alive and imbued with spiritual energy” (53) and “Consistent with the view that all nature is alive, Pagans revere the Earth as a living being, often referring to the Earth as Mother Earth or Gaia . . .” (55).

As we have noted, the ultimate anthropomorphic image of such an interconnected, mutually permeating whole “imbued with spiritual energy” in NeoPaganism is The Goddess. With a femininity based partly on traditional interpretations of Earth as “receptive” to the sky god’s “active” (seed, rain, and sun) and partly on the need to counterbalance the perceived dominant patriarchal zeitgeist, the Goddess is the name given to the combination of the whole Earth Being and the sacredness with which Earth is intellectually viewed and intuitively experienced through ritual and magic by most NeoPagans.

Multiple Identities of the Goddess

The distinction should be made here between the Goddess being 1) what Carpenter calls “a metaphor/symbol,” 2) the resident immanent divinity of Earth, and 3) the actual Earth.

Especially those who are not comfortable with a theistic, metaphysical expression of divinity accept the first in much of NeoPaganism. For them, the Goddess is, as Jung would suggest, an archetype, a powerful psychologically and sociologically meaningful “metaphor/symbol” representing the empathetic spiritual experience enhanced by ritual and magic, and signifying the totality of the web of life.

The second is linked to Matthew Fox’s panentheism where God is *in* all things. Carpenter discusses this briefly within the context of immanent versus transcendent deity.

Panentheism, he says, is specifically integrated into the NeoPagan worldview and may be described as

postmodern in the sense of moving beyond the individuation and duality of modernity already described. Sheldrake also revealed a panentheistic perspective when he said ‘God is not remote and separate from nature, but immanent within it. Yet at the same time God is unity which transcends it.’ (51)

The whole, then, is greater than the sum of its parts, constituting in its entirety a discreet reality different from and larger than its constituent elements.

The third, Goddess as Earth, posits *The Lady*, as she is frequently called, completely embodied by the planet. “Mother Earth,” as we have noted before, can be conceived, even worshipped, as a discrete sacred entity among a universe of conscious planet-beings and other, unimagined phenomena. She can also be considered one aspect of a greater deity embodied by the entire observable universe. Poetry and science meet where the seas are the blood and tectonic plates the skin of the Goddess. It is logical under this concept that nature should be “worshipped” or, more accurately “honored,” as a divine object. This brings us full circle to NeoPagans as “tree worshippers,” which sounds idolatrous coming from the mouth of a non-Pagan, but is in fact often true.

Each of these ideas represents a slightly different worldview. The first suggests that deities are representations of deep and powerful archetypes in the human psyche. The second sees divinity as absolutely identical to and wholly limited by material reality. The third leaves room for divinity to be material while possessing a transcendent reality as well. All these opinions are prevalent in NeoPaganism and may even be held simultaneously. For many NeoPagans, the Goddess is definitively and intimately associated with the whole planet as a living being, with the term “Goddess” interspersed freely as a synonym or an inseparably connected approximation. There is little or no

notion that the Goddess is purely transcendent, involved with but essentially apart from nature.

When your environment literally is a Goddess, the living body of your deity, then your entire life, not just your religious life, is potentially affected. As we have noted, NeoPaganism possesses an ethic of ecological awareness, and many NeoPagans are also environmental activists, which, in its radical form, constitutes a sacred task of protecting the Mother. The slogan of Earth First!, for example, “No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth” reflects this warrior-protector ethic. Starhawk reiterates the ecological foundations of NeoPaganism:

The model of the Goddess, who is immanent in nature, fosters respect for the sacredness of all living things. Witchcraft can be seen as a religion of ecology. Its goal is harmony with nature, so that life may not just survive, but thrive. (64)

Based on a sense of immanent value and sacredness, the complexity and grace of nature “fosters respect” and an empathic response that is clearly familial, stimulated by a sense of deep interconnectedness. Starhawk continues, describing a “mandate for action stemming from such a religion of ecology”:

When we start to understand that the Earth is alive, she calls us to act to preserve her life. When we understand that everything is interconnected, we are called to a politics and set of actions that come from compassion, from the ability to literally feel with all living beings on the Earth. (64)

No understanding of NeoPaganism is complete without this holy activism that goes deeper than simply intellectual response to the core passions and fervor of the religious experience. Activism, therefore, is in protection of the Goddess, a task emotively different from the scientific efforts of ecology alone.

The panentheistic “Goddess as Earth” motif suggests a radical pantheism – where divinity *is* all things. The idea of Earth, even the cosmos, as one living and sacred being

is a deep assumption of many NeoPagans. Such an assumption helps explain how Earth, a planet covered with life but regarded by science as itself an inert ball of molten magma and ancient rock, might come to be honored not just as a conscious meta-being but also as a great living Goddess. It is this multi-natured deity, composed with poetic flourish and envisioned with a compassionate face that is most common. The radical immanence of a divine and living world making up the body of the Goddess combined with the understanding that She also transcends physicality into the spiritual realm of emergent evolution, the “unknown,” and the greater reality of which humans partake in ritual and magic is the fullest picture of deity in the Old Religion.

CHAPTER 4

THE ECOLOGICAL METHOD

This Chapter is an attempt to begin explicating my proposal for an Ecological Method of Religious Study. It first sets the Method in the context of two writers who critique the educational systems of industrialized cultures, then it explains the Method's basic precepts and applications. This explication is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather an introduction and stimulus to further development of the ideas presented. We noted that NeoPaganism is a synthesis of spirituality and nature, a living tradition that exemplifies the confluence of these two areas of study. But how, then, can one study spirituality through the interpretive lens of nature, which I suggest is a significantly more inclusive, and thus more fully accurate and complete approach? This Method is not meant to be the final word in theory or methodology, but rather another step in the process of our understanding.

Let us then first place the ideas of the Ecological Method in a larger context of similar works, in particular those of David Orr and C. A. Bowers, whose writings in effect lay the foundation for our further ruminations. Each of these writers has an environmental perspective expressed through an examination of the educational system as it presently functions. They each find fault with that system, and each offers a solution resulting in increased ecological awareness with the end result of producing more environmentally competent and educated students who can contribute to rectifying the environmental crisis rather than mindlessly propagating it.

David Orr and Deep Education for Biophilia

We begin with David Orr's *Earth in Mind* (1994) that focuses on education and its role in either hindering or furthering a broad, systemic, and compassionate understanding of the world and our human place in it. The problem, as he sees it, is not in changing certain aspects of the educational system as it stands, but in questioning the whole educational enterprise at its deepest level. Orr finds the current "K through Ph.D." system lacking in that it educates people in ways that reduce the chances of our survival. He therefore recommends new ways of teaching, learning, and, ultimately, living, that increase those chances. In the Introduction to Part One, he sums up the problem: "The truth is that without significant precautions, education can equip people merely to be more effective vandals of the earth" (5).

He begins by discussing how education as it is currently practiced serves to perpetuate disconnection from and ignorance of ecological wholeness. He complains that educational reformers

usually aim to produce people whose purposes and outlook are narrowly economic, not to educate citizens and certainly not 'citizens of the biotic community' (16)

In other words, contemporary education does little more than indoctrinate people in the ways and means of mercantilism in order to churn out productive members of a capitalist industrial society, the very social feature that most contributes to environmental degradation. He sees ethical as well as ecological dangers in educational systems that teach technics but not ethics that produce "clever" people without the broader ability to think with rationality and compassion that constitutes his definition of "intelligence." He further insists that there exists a "sacred order" which can be disturbed by those who fail to see the world as a whole (17). There is a loss of the wider picture of interconnections

and relationships that make up this “order” when one’s education narrowly defines, separates, and disconnects various subjects into discreet, isolated categories plucked out of the complex and unified matrix of reality. As Orr puts it, education is in danger of

imprinting a disciplinary template onto impressionable minds and with it the belief that the world really is as disconnected as the divisions, disciplines, and subdisciplines of the typical curriculum. (23)

Instead, Orr advocates a broader, more holistic approach, one that takes into account deeper realities, ones not always immediately obvious, ones that have the profoundest effects because they are virtually subliminal in their importance. The opposite is usually true about a conventional education: it is shallow, short-term, and focused only on what can be perceived in the present.

One result is that students graduate without knowing how to think in whole systems, how to find connections, how to ask big questions, and how to separate the trivial from the important. (23)

Orr’s solution to this problem is the development, from the earliest ages, of a special kind of empathy which Harvard entomologist E. O. Wilson calls “biophilia” (1984). That it is a kind of empathy there is little doubt, for he is constantly referring to emotive responses to nature. Referring to Rachel Carson’s *The Sense of Wonder* (1984), Orr establishes his belief that it is more important to *feel* than to *know*. Knowledge alone is ultimately destructive, but a sense of awe and wonder is salvific. As we noted, his emphasis is on connections and relatedness, a perception that can only really be achieved by viewing the whole as a single unity. That is, he believes

There is no way to separate feeling from knowledge. There is no way to separate object from subject. There is no good way and no good reason to separate mind or body from its ecological and emotional context. (31)

To reconnect knowledge (information) and feeling (empathy) is to heal a wound that expresses itself in graduating class after graduating class being unable to fully grasp the

implications of their actions because they cannot see the whole and do not have an emotional connection to the Earth. It is by reconciliation of alienated oppositions and similarities that wholeness is achieved, and it is wholeness that exposes the underlying unity and interdependency of the world. Orr's argument, then, is for an education that "prepares people for lives and livelihoods suited to a planet with a biosphere that operates by the laws of nature and thermodynamics" (27).

Orr's method of preparing people for lives "suited to a planet with a biosphere" is an empathetic response that may be called "biophilia" or life-love. That we must love life is not a unique sentiment, but it is finely applied here in the critique of education. Orr suggests a link between love and science, presently estranged in so many ways, by asking, "Why is it so hard to talk about love, the most powerful of human emotions, in relation to science, the most powerful and far-reaching of human activities?" (44) Love is, for Orr, a missing ingredient in the healing brew he is attempting to make through educational reformation. With it, biophilia becomes a legitimate subject for discussion and inquiry.

Biophilia was defined by Erich Fromm (1973) as "the passionate love of life and of all that is alive" and by E. O. Wilson (1984) as "the urge to affiliate with other forms of life" (365-366). Orr considers it no less than an innate "sign of mental and physical health" (132). We need this healthy love of what is alive because we possess the technological means to destroy much of nature and thus our own support system. If we were still ecologically innocent or disinclined to industrial despoliation of nature, we would not need to develop and nurture this sense of life-love. But we are not innocent

and we do show a marked propensity for environmental destruction, so including biophilia in curricula is essential.

The opposite of biophilia is *biophobia*, the distaste for and distrust of nature. Orr sees this as the fundamental problem, for which love is the solution. Biophobia is deleterious for three reasons: it “shrinks the range of experiences and joys in life,” “is the foundation for a politics of domination and exploitation,” and “violates an ancient charge to replenish the earth” (136). In the same way, Orr gives us several reasons why biophilia is important, especially in education. For instance, he says that “we know that the capacity for love of any kind begins early in the life and imagination of the child” (142). It may be surmised that teaching young people life-love from the beginning would go a long way in cultivating sustainable lifestyle choices as they get older.

This is the justification for teaching about the intrinsic value and beauty of nature in all its complexity starting in elementary school. Also, Orr advocates the protection of wilderness because “we know that biophilia requires easily and safely accessible places where it might take root and grow” (142). In other words, it is in quiet, nonhuman spaces that life-love can be most fruitfully and deeply cultivated. Preservation of wild and rural areas is paramount to incubation sites where “mental and physical health” can be restored and/or maintained. Finally, for the necessary changes to take place that encourage empathy and biophilia, a “metanoia, or the ‘transformation of one’s whole being’ is necessary first” (145). A fundamental change, which is more than a “paradigm shift” must take place in our “loyalties, affections, and basic character,” and thus with our relationship with Earth. This constitutes the “Biophilia Revolution” (145).

Orr pulls back from the educational system itself, putting it in perspective and challenging its most entrenched assumptions, holding them up to the standard of long-term human survival on Earth. Survival becomes the standard by which all educational curricula and methodologies are judged, for only by such standards is the prosperity of Earth, and thus humankind, assured.

C. A. Bowers and Environmentally Cogent Curricula

C. A. Bowers, in his book *The Culture of Denial* (1997) continues Orr's general theme, concentrating on how "public schools and universities continue to reinforce the conceptual and moral foundations of what should be understood as a culture of denial" (vii). The denial takes the form of a belief that techno-industrial civilization has no real effect on the Earth's biosystems, that civilization as it is can continue indefinitely into the future without serious consequences. In other words, the planet will simply support our consumerist lifestyle without complaint, forever. What Bowers calls "carefully orchestrated visual images of plenitude" help cut us off from the reality of topsoil erosion, dwindling resources, toxic waste buildup, and other fundamental threats to the future.

Bowers continues with a brief critique of the culture's educational denial of our interconnectedness. He suggests first that

ecologically problematic cultural patterns are encoded and thus reproduced through the language processes mediated by public school teachers and university professors. (viii)

Like an informational virus, these encoded linguistic patterns are ubiquitous and mainly invisible. They are passed on, generally unexamined and unchallenged, through the educational system, which acts as the carrier of these "ecologically problematic"

assumptions. We may think of this as a “shadow education” that is included covertly in the more obvious curricula.

Bowers also divides knowledge into two distinct categories: high-status and low-status. The former is “associated with modern assumptions, values, and ways of knowing,” while the latter is knowledge “which is not associated with the modern individualistic and technologically oriented culture of change . . .” (1). Low-status knowledge is generally absent or minimal in universities, but possessed by ecologically stable or “primal” cultures. Bowers calls this division “invidious” and condemns the academic prejudice against environmentally cogent curricula, saying that it is “increasingly difficult to ignore the connections between the high-status forms of knowledge promoted by public schools and universities and the ecological crisis” (1).

Further, he notes that it is no coincidence that

the knowledge of relationships that ecologically centered cultures have developed is considered by modern individuals to be ‘primitive,’ backward, and unworthy of advanced, progressive cultures. (6)

So the very knowledge about living in perpetuity on the Earth is held and exemplified by cultures dismissed as inferior and “primitive,” unworthy of attention by “advanced, progressive cultures.” Both the knowledge and the holders of that knowledge are held in contempt because they do not engage in modern, technological civilization-building. Bowers condemns the lack of ecological or “low-status” knowledge in public education because it produces knowledge that contributes to, rather than critically examines and solves, the environmental crisis. It is, for him, a matter of simple, but potentially catastrophic, ignorance.

Even contemporary social movements and academic revolts hold little hope of addressing such problems and assuaging this ignorance. Postmodernism, for instance, is

merely an extension of modernism because, for one thing, the postmodernists have “ignored the relationship between culture and natural systems” (74) as if culture arose out of the pure thought of the liberal arts, isolated almost completely from the balance and processes of nature. The educational system ends up as a microcosm of techno-industrial civilization whose sense of educational adventure and inquiry seemingly wilts and dies away at the edges of techno-industrialism, as if our brains floated on rarefied ether. Of course, nature is always there, the ignored hum of life that makes all intellectual pursuits possible. The food we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the very land on which a university stands, all form the foundations on which human aspiration finds its expression. When this foundation is eroded, the dreamy arrogance of the well-educated collapses, for none has even the most basic understanding of how to live nonviolently in nature. A college education, which is supposed to make one whole and ready to take on the world, actually prepares us to be little more than shock troops in the ongoing destruction of the planet.

Bowers challenges us to reconsider some of the most basic, and therefore invisible, assumptions of a liberal education:

All forms of liberalism have had difficulty reconciling the moral responsibility of humans with the larger biotic community because of their emphasis on individual freedom, the emancipatory power of critical reflection and instrumental rationalism, and the expectation that change represents a continual expansion of human possibilities. (120)

First, from where does the “moral responsibility of humans with the larger biotic community” emerge? One argument might be that if there is any meaning at all to moral or ethical behavior, it includes proscriptions against wanton violence. And if this premise is accepted, and the very life of humans is inexorably bound up with the health of the environment, then to damage the environment is to threaten human life. Just as we have

a direct responsibility to restrain ourselves from premeditated murder, so we have the indirect responsibility to preserve the ecological balance of nature on which everyone depends for survival. Second, one must engage the difficult task of reconciling that moral responsibility with the characteristics Bowers names as being at the heart of liberalism: freedom, reflection, rationalism, and expansion of human possibilities. These things are seemingly the bedrock of the American educational system. Yet Bowers insists that these same virtues most people hold dear also contribute to the environmental crisis. This implies that there are set limitations on what humans are free to do and on the expansion of the human enterprise established by the biosystem itself. This boundary is violated at our own risk, but overturning liberalism, not of intrahuman affairs but of our relationship with Earth, promises to be a daunting and highly resisted task, especially by those educated (read “indoctrinated”) by public schools.

If spirituality is to have a true voice in solving environmental challenges, it must attend to the rampant scientism that has swept into almost every corner of the university.

As Bowers states:

The privileged and nearly sacrosanct status accorded to the sciences within the university faculties, which can be seen in the tendency of other disciplines to emulate the scientific mode of inquiry that enables them to claim objective status for their findings, suggests a starting point for considering the cultural and educational aspects of the ecological crisis. (39)

Science is often the coinage of legitimacy for academia, and spirituality has worn the restrictive garments of that scientific hegemony for decades, if not centuries. There can be little doubt that religion departments across the country “emulate the scientific mode of inquiry,” even if such a mode interferes with the ability of religious academics to freely and fully articulate and investigate their subject. Fortunately, the situation appears to be improving, not just for the wider study of ecospirituality and other related interests,

but also for the awakening of academics to the greater connections that either contributes to or assist in solving the environmental crisis.

Importance of the Ecological Method

It is for these reasons that an explanation of the Ecological Method is important. While acknowledging the irony of using a scientific term (albeit a revolutionary one) to describe an unscientific (but still rigorous) methodology, it may be advocated as a genuinely innovative approach that addresses the concerns of a new century.

Along with the venerated historical, sociological, and psychoanalytic methods, our new era requires a fresh approach to the academic study of religion and spirituality. Other methods continue to make valuable contributions to religious studies, but as the awareness of our place in the wider field of Life increases, it is time to step back and contextualize religion and spirituality within the larger community of Earth brought to light by ecology and environmentalism. The *Ecological Method* is concerned with the integration of these postmodern influences on religious investigations and philosophy. It encompasses a larger canvas of human reality and stretches the bounds of conventional methodologies, especially in its inclusion within the concept of spirituality the concerns of the nonhuman world. It is multi-religious with a planetary perspective including but not limited to *homo sapiens*. It does not insist that nonhuman animals or inanimate phenomena participate in religion or even spirituality themselves, but that they ought to be, perhaps even must be, part of the human examination and manifestation of spirituality.

As we have previously noted, *ecology* is about locating our home on Earth and in our bodies as well as in transcendent, nonphysical realities. The Ecological Method takes into full account Earth and all its inhabitants when considering spirituality. It relocates

our spiritual nexus to the Earth while admitting the possibility of other realities of conscious existence after death and otherwise beyond our knowledge and perception. It does so by identifying religion and spirituality as a human phenomenon particular to and dependent on the interface of physicality and spirit. By physicality we mean the physical, material, sensory – and by extension mental, emotional and experiential – reality of living as a human being on Earth. By spirit we mean connection with the transcendent, yet simultaneously immanent, Beyond or Other. Without both, religion would not exist as we know it.

Four Areas of Focus of the Ecological Method

The Ecological Method includes four areas of focus stimulated by the emerging consciousness of the twenty-first century: evolutionary consciousness, global perspective, sacred Earth, and disciplined activism. Each of these is inclusive, overlapping, and mutually influential. They represent an attempt at adding to the rich store of knowledge about how to think about and interact with spirituality. It is not supposed to be the end of the discussion, but a new beginning, a fresh dialogue addressing the current concerns and needs of a dynamic academic religious community.

Evolutionary Consciousness

Evolution, as it is used here, does not refer to Darwinian primalgenesis evolution, the unproved theory that all life on Earth shares a common single-celled progenitor formed from a mixture of elements in primordial tidepools that over eons developed into the complexity and variety of the present. Although this is an interesting hypothesis, without further evidence the jury is still out. What I refer to here as “evolution” is the notion that species change over time, where change is defined as increased maturity, awareness, and adaptability, together with deeper intelligence and expanded

consciousness. However, evolution is not a valuated hierarchy. Those attributes that characterize humankind are not *a priori* superior to nonhuman attributes. In fact, it is possible that we are, in our destructiveness, inferior and clueless beings who have wandered off and become lost from our own planetary metasystem. Nevertheless, it is the position of the Ecological Method that humans are an integral element of Earth's metasystem, destructive tendencies and all, and as much a part of nature as dragonflies or daisies.

Evolution, or more specifically *emergent evolution*, refers to the ongoing process of individual psychological and emotional – as well as collective social and cultural – maturation, an indication of increased complexity. Everything new is part of evolution, but everything that promotes planetary health and prosperity is *positive evolution*, and this is the only kind I consider legitimate to sustain and promote. It is through physically-based ethical systems and Earth-inclusive spiritualities that we can differentiate between positive and negative evolution (*devolution*). It is by the establishment of empathy that an ethic is created, and empathy is encouraged by the transcendent power of Earth-inclusive religious and spiritual praxis. As noted in Chapter Three, NeoPaganism is an example of such praxis.

Emergent evolution involves growth and maturation of the consciousness. Implied is the proposition that humans are capable of growth and expansion, through various methods and by the evolutionary process, in a trajectory progressively leading to compassion and prosperity. The overriding assumption is that part of the solution to current difficulties (violence, ecodestruction, “evil”) is within the human mind and consciousness. We may be hardwired for a propensity towards destructive behavior, but

salvation is present in each person as an internal element that can be nurtured and developed. This inner transformation is part of a new evolutionary Story, a mythological vision that finds humans increasingly able to live with each other and the nonhuman world in increasing peace and harmony.

Emergent evolution also posits the evolution of religion and spirituality. Rather than a static, profoundly conservative phenomenon endlessly repeating (a)historical events, spirituality is dynamic, growthful, and potentially transformational, critically important to human evolution. Because spirituality is about expansion and maturation of the consciousness, it involves a belief – a faith, really – that human activity is part of an ongoing process, a process of which spirituality is one important manifestation. For it is religion and spirituality that are the caretakers of transformation.

Global Perspective

A global perspective involves “seeing” human activity, including religiosity, in the wider context of the entire planet as a holistic system. A “holistic system” means that humans are one part of a larger entity, Earth, which is variously considered a vast living organism, a conscious metabeing, or even a deity. We draw our religious beliefs and practices from the Earth, from the land, plants, animals, climate, and from our bodies (including the mind) that all partake in “earthiness.” Earth is the theater of our religious and spiritual existence. Until we live on other planets or in space, and until or if our organic bodies are replaced with artificial ones, Earth, in conjunction with transcendent realities, is the mother of our spirits.

In taking a global perspective with the study of spirituality, one must accept the conclusion that there are many religions held deeply by many people, that spirituality is a global phenomenon, and that *diversity* is therefore an undeniable reality. In fact, nature

has shown us that diversity is healthy and that monoculture is almost always not.

Therefore, given the striving for emergent evolutionary ethics, we accept and even celebrate this diversity, considering all religions and spiritual traditions equally legitimate and valuable for their adherents and possibly ourselves.

In addition, there is an element of universality to a global perspective. Even though there is considerable diversity in the world – and it is healthy – there are also many activities and beliefs that are strikingly common across cultures. Certain myths, symbols, metaphors, and practices are shared from Mozambique to Polynesia, as the work of Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell have suggested. Ultimately, this acceptance of universality exposes our unity, not just within different traditions but also extended out to nonhumans as well. In unity we can see how conflict separates and isolates us into discreet and contentious groups, exacerbating our most violent and destructive tendencies. The Ecological Method recognizes that conflicts and internecine squabbles are not inherently religious in nature. They are outward, visible signs of evolutionary immaturity endemic to many social activities. In other words, there are no “religious conflicts” per se, only “unevolved” individuals expressing their violence in pseudo-religious terms.

Sacred Earth

Sacred Earth refers to the position, simple in concept but complex in manifestation, that the planet is sacred. “Sacred” indicates something imbued with transcendent importance and special value deserving reverence and humility. Just the opposite description characterizes the current attitude towards Earth by a comfortable majority of humans, and in particular what Daniel Quinn in his *Ishmael* books (1992, 1997) calls “Taker” cultures. As opposed to “Leaver” cultures, Takers assume that the Earth was

given to them for their private use, and that humans have a special, exclusive relationship to the transcendent that grants them unchallengeable kingship over the world. The sacralization of Earth comes in three steps: inclusion of humanity into “nature,” rewriting the dominant mythos, and admitting deity back into the world.

Integrating humankind back into nature is not going to be an easy task. We in the industrialized civilizational cultures, who are the vast majority, have been telling ourselves origin stories about our eternal and infinite dominance over this planet for so many millennia that it has become a *deep assumption* seemingly embedded in the very nature of reality. Challenging the Story that humans tell themselves and each other at this level of subconscious or deep assumption is difficult, but it must be done in order to rewrite, a la Thomas Berry, the dominant mythology on which many of our most destructive behaviors are founded. If we are not the special creation of God who were given the Earth as our personal dominion to live in and alter at our whim, then we might be able to re-admit deity, in whatever forms our culture expresses, back into the nonhuman world. If God then re-enters the world, not just in people but also in trees, cows, soil, water, and atmosphere, then we will have to treat those things differently than we do now. While this may not be the specific task of the Ecological Method, it is one result of its application.

The resacralization of Earth would also impact factory farming, carnivorous diets, urban planning, and, most importantly to this thesis, the nature-body / mind-spirit dichotomy. The body has been conceived of as a basically recyclable machine, a form to carry us through this life, to be cast off at death on our way to the real or true world of the afterlife. Life is a temporary passing through linear time from birth to eternity where

judgment will take place based on one's performance during life. There is no reason to care about the Earth. But with the new Story, everything in life, including the world around us, is recognizable as valuable in its own right, not just for how it can serve humanity's interests. We become one of many beings, and life becomes more than a judging field set between human soul and deity. It has a separate sacredness that exists independent of us. We can then have a peer relationship with nature like a kinship. The "family" is extended outward to the living multiplicity of Earth. We can more easily recognize the individual personalities of nonhuman animals and, eventually, the particular energies and essences of plants and mountains, deserts and oceans. We can also recognize those attributes not only in our spirits, but also in our bodies. Rather than the spirit being the "operator" in the machine of the body, our consciousness is a result of the synthesis of transcendent spirit and material physicality, both of which are necessary for our humanness and the greater enterprise that includes religion and spirituality.

One of the arguments frequently encountered against the sacralization of Earth is that we would have to "backtrack" and therefore make drastic changes in the industrial-scientific civilizational culture, which has brought us such miracles as space flight, modern medicine, and global communication. Viewing these phenomena from the perspective of the Ecological Method, one notices that while these are all positive things, the *way* they were achieved was not necessarily so. The question is whether the Industrial model is the only method of reaching these places. Is there no other human quality as yet undeveloped that might bring us all the healthful, convenient, and comforting lives we now value? In other words, is there another path we might explore and find fruitful to fulfill our aspirations? Hypothetically, can the security and luxury so

many crave be manifested and the adventures accessed in a way that does not require the wholesale devaluation and attendant degradation of our planet? Is there, in fact, a “spiritual” path to these same human needs and desires? Questions like this shows how the Ecological Method sets about challenging the assumptions made about, well, everything, and we will revisit these questions in the Conclusion. There is nothing that the Method does not examine through the lens of the ultimate ethic of human survival and prosperity on Earth, and no subject is inappropriate or taboo. If it exists on Earth or in the known universe, it is fair game for our expansive, holistic, inclusive Methodology.

Activism

Activism may in some ways be the most problematic characteristic of the Ecological Method. Academic work is generally considered to be a thing of the mind: of thought and writing those thoughts. Though physical work may be done during research and so on, that effort is in the name of producing a communicable work like a paper, dissertation, book, or web site. But the activist aspect of the Method is about physical activity in the name of changing social, cultural, and physical reality towards a greater spiritual-ecological awareness. It demands the academician become individually involved in the larger process to which spirituality and nature speaks. It requires an end to ivory tower isolationism and a willingness to project into the material world of humans and nonhumans those values and methodologies discussed in this thesis.

Activism takes two basic forms: public and personal. The former is what most of us identify with “activism”: people marching, demonstrating, and otherwise drawing public attention to an issue or situation. The classic model for me is the Civil Rights movement, which galvanized a generation in response to the problems of racial inequality and discrimination. This model has been used effectively in many arenas, especially its

nonviolent Gandhi / King form where activists use awareness-raising tactics but take responsibility for the consequences of the possibly illegal but morally justifiable actions within a self-sacrificial motif. However, no other issue is ultimately more sweeping in its scope or urgent in its consequences than environmentalism. Everyone in all corners of the globe may potentially be harmed by ecological degradation, and some studies suggest that the entire planet may be adversely affected, making ecological issues genuinely universal concerns.

Personal activism is also a critical ingredient of the Ecological Method. In some ways, individual actions may be even more important because, combined, they constitute a *movement* to change the surrounding social context. If I attend a demonstration for clean air but drive a mile to get there, the result is, I submit, qualitatively less than if I choose to use alternative modes of transportation such as bus or bicycle in my daily life.

The Ecological Method makes its users obligated to live a spiritual and environmental life as deeply and widely as they feel is possible. This imperative crosses a boundary of sorts between traditional methodologies and their theories: the Ecological Method speaks not only to ways of interpreting and writing about spirituality, but also expands its field of influence to everyday life decisions and activities, encompassing not just intellectual processes, but all life processes. In this way, activism reflects a new aspect of methodology that is inclusive and holistic. Once we become aware of the possible crisis of spirit and Earth facing us in the twenty-first century, we find thrust upon us the need to make decisions about how we will conduct our lives, in every aspect, to either contribute to the crisis or to its resolution.

Activism extends ethical considerations to the area of intellectual honesty. It posits that we cannot advocate or even study spirituality without actively acknowledging the greater context in which spirituality exists, that of Earth and the physical universe. And that to ignore these considerations is paramount to hypocrisy. These are harsh terms, but they expose the deep commitment the Method espouses and represents to the larger theater of human existence. There is a world outside academia that desperately needs the wisdom and insight cultivated *in* academia. Surely technological advances and innovations flow abundantly out to the general population, as well as literary and artistic work. Spirituality is no different: it has a critical part to play in the world. Such an admission opens up the role of the public intellectual and frees our often sophisticated ideas and places them in that outward flow of new ideas. The results of the academic study of religion and spirit have a place in the larger social, political, and artistic realm at every level of contact. Anything less is a betrayal of our task as scholars, teachers, and thinkers.

Ecological Method and the Dominant *Zeitgeist*

These four characteristics of the Ecological Method, though hardly fleshed out to their fullness, are at least a beginning to the task, which may be taken up by those so inspired, of readmitting nature into the discussions of spirituality. It does not advocate a return to an older model of religion largely motivated by unconscious anxieties but rather engagement with a new model and, eventually, the elimination of models, leaving relationship as the primary method of perceiving the universe. It is part of the process of the establishment of a new planetary cultural myth. We recognize that humankind must have a new story to replace the old. The development and dissemination of this story is the task of the next century.

No doubt the Ecological Method challenges the current dominant *zeitgeist* of scientism and industrialism. It questions the precepts of science because they are the foundations for industrial civilization, and it is becoming increasingly evident that such an expression of culture, no matter how overwhelmingly colossal and successful it now appears, may not be viable. It has led to a present that, even eliminating the environmental crisis, is potentially terminal in its increasing violence and destructiveness. Therefore, the Ecological Method is post-scientistic, utilizing a different language, worldview, ethos, and set of assumptions. The description of this post-scientism as it applies to the study, or rather metaconnection (deep affinity) with, religion (collective) and spirituality (individual) is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the process of exploring these deep assumptions about how we study and perceive religion and spirituality are only the beginning. What will emerge from it in the future is as yet unknown. That future is unlikely to be familiar to we who labor in the present, so in essence we are working for a future so radically and positively different that we would be strangers in it. Part of that work is the development of a canon of recognizable and common ethical beliefs and behaviors that will begin to constitute an early version of a future system resulting in the unity and kinship of all creation, not as an externally enforced dictum but rather an internally developed compassion. In this task, religion and spirituality can and must have an integral voice and vision.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The transformation from modernism to a new age is not going to be quick or simple. It is likely to be as chaotic and culturally disruptive as the movement from medievalism to modernism. Many of the entrenched status quo that have a deep psychological and mythical investment in modernism are not going to just let go and move into the future. They are going to hold on to what they know and fight the upstarts they see destroying their world. The truth is, of course, that every new era inadvertently destroys the old, but that appears to be the nature of the chaotic restlessness of Western civilization. The fact is we have a perceptible problem in the way that civilization is functioning, and the solution to that problem is cultural transformation.

This can no longer be dismissed as New Age “woo woo.” It is a conclusion shared by millions of Americans, according to recent surveys, and is often self-evident through emerging data. The problem can no longer be ignored, and in many respects, the problem is civilization itself. While not throwing the baby out with the bathwater, the prevailing concept of civilization as centered on the *civitas* and its contemporary technoindustrial scientism is coming under increasing scrutiny. I submit we are, in fact, moving from civilization to postcivilization, to a culture based not on consumption and technological progress but on values of sustainability and sociospiritual maturation. It is a measure of how innovative and new such concepts are that they sound so foreign in the present. Nevertheless, the evidence is convincing that transformation is our only alternative. The writers in Chapter Two and the research data collected by them and others strongly

support the wisdom of entering the unknown lands of change rather than maintaining the known destructiveness of business as usual. Dark those lands seem at first, for they are uncharted and radically different.

Cultural Creatives

But there are guideposts on the way that point in the right direction. One of them is *The Cultural Creatives* (2000) by Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson. *Cultural Creatives* serves as a glimpse into the lives of what the authors consider a distinct subgroup of the American population. Based on an exhaustive survey over a thirteen year period and involving approximately 100,000 people, Cultural Creatives emerge as one of three categories the authors identify, along with Traditionals and Moderns. These categories are based not on opinions, attitudes, or trends but are grounded in “the values and worldviews that shape people’s lives” (7).

Traditionals, roughly a quarter of the population, are generally social and political conservatives, overwhelmingly Catholic, Mormon, fundamentalist, and Evangelical Protestant, focused in The South but also anywhere there are small towns and rural communities. Most have low incomes and an education up to but rarely beyond high school. Their values and beliefs include patriarchal family structure, antifeminism, community rootedness, customary and familiar ways of life, conservative religious practice, regulation of “sin” – including abortion – patriotism, virtues of country and small town life, and suspicion of foreigners and anything different.

Moderns, on the other hand, represent the dominant subgroup, clearly identifiable in the pages of Time and Newsweek, on CNN and the networks, and in politics. At roughly half of the US population, they are liberal and conservative, rich and poor, urban

and suburban. They are the “normal” culture in offices, universities, public schools, sports, entertainment, industry, and the local mall. As the authors put it,

The standards we take for granted, the rules we live by, are made by and for Moderns. Their worldview is so all-encompassing and their viewpoint so much presupposed that most Moderns can’t see any alternatives. (25)

They believe in a technological economy and its inevitable spread across the globe as “progress.” They see discreet parts, but are less likely to understand the whole. Their values and beliefs include making money, being stylish, having material possessions and lots of choices, lack of concern about inner spiritual life, and the beliefs that the body is a machine, bigger is better, science is truth, and the way things are is pretty much how they should be.

Contrasted against these two are the Cultural Creatives, the focus of the book and, according to the authors, the harbingers of a better future. CCs know (or want to know) the world in terms of its wholeness and interconnectedness. As the authors put it, “Cultural Creatives like to get a synoptic view – they want to see all the parts spread out side by side and trace the interconnections” (11). They are for this and other reasons decidedly postmodern in their thinking. The legacy of the Enlightenment and scientism is that everything is dividable into discreet and controllable entities, but CCs tend to see such divided isolation as part of the systemic problem manifesting as Modern ills. It is to address these ills that CCs believe and behave as they do. For instance, they are greatly concerned with environmental and ecological issues. Ray and Anderson even cite this as their primary characteristic, and the sense of urgency born of the crisis mode we spoke of earlier in the thesis is evident. The authors quote Ray Anderson, a CC entrepreneur, as saying, “Unless we become part of the solution, it’s over, and our great-grandchildren won’t have a world worth living in” (11). CCs hold the big picture and also create

powerful new solutions, and it is this combination that results in both unique but deeply held beliefs and their manifestation in public and/or private activism with often startling innovations.

Cultural Creatives also tend to advocate and strive for authenticity – that is, basically, walking the talk – as well as idealism, feminism, and self-actualization. Authenticity is about telling the truth and avoiding hypocrisy, meaning that “your actions are consistent with what you believe and what you say,” with a preference involving “direct personal experience in addition to intellectual ways of knowing” (8). Knowing consequently encompasses deeper and more complete understanding, not just shallow media sound bites. The example given is oil companies that run ads on their support of wildlife sanctuaries, the deeper truth being that such companies usually spend much more energy and money blocking real and meaningful environmental legislation.

Idealism includes activism as part of their authenticity. CCs do not usually hold ideals without manifesting them in reality. As the authors contend,

[Cultural Creatives] expect to follow through on their values with personal action. Many are convinced that if they are not engaged, their convictions are ‘just talk’.
(10)

CCs most often attempt to live their ideals through selective spending (supporting those companies and causes that follow their ideals) and public demonstrations like “procotts” or protests, the “Battle of Seattle” being one example.

With feminism, CCs recognize the importance of women and feminine energy (something also important to NeoPagans). Women have a voice that, in its absence, creates dis-ease in the culture. As the authors suggest,

[Cultural Creatives] see women’s ways of knowing as valid: feeling empathy and sympathy for others, taking the viewpoint of the one who speaks, seeing personal

experiences and first-person stories as important ways of learning, and embracing an ethic of caring. (12)

Along with concern for children, well-being of families (in whatever loving form), and caring relationships of all kinds, women are often in leadership positions in CC enterprises and almost all CCs in the survey embrace “women’s issues” and “women’s values.”

Finally, in terms of self-actualization, a large majority of CCs either practice or at least support various forms of self-improvement, growth, altruism, and spirituality. They combine social and personal transformation and inner and outer work, each reflected in the other. They may be members of a mainstream spirituality, but their spirituality is authentic in that its transformational qualities are manifested in efforts to change the culture, by personal growth and public activism. They are

concerned about both social justice and the development of an inner life. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, these concerns are not mutually exclusive, for their sense of the sacred includes personal growth, service to others, and social activism. (15)

Along with a strong sense of the importance of nature in life and the protection of the planet’s nature for the future’s children, these four aspects of the Cultural Creatives form the argument that CCs are harbingers of a better future and, some would argue, the hope for any kind of human future at all.

The authors mark the beginning of the first phase of CCs in the mid 1960s, and submit that throughout the 70s CCs focused on inner spiritual growth and maturation. The second phase came in the 80s and 90s when external activism and organization was added to the mix. The stage we are in now sees mutual recognition and resulting unity of purpose. The book has as one of its self-appointed missions this self-recognition process,

for if there are, in fact, millions who would identify as CC, their unity and activism would be transformational, indeed.

Cultural Creatives and NeoPaganism

Without doubt, NeoPagans are almost universally within the Cultural Creative group. Their very nature is usually one of personal, and often cultural, transformation and maturation, and in their magical connection to nature and the inner being, NeoPagans are, I submit, a primary or core CC spirituality. Ray and Anderson specifically mention Wiccans in terms of “consciousness movements”

because of their common intention to throw open the windows and doors of the musty old mind-sets we live in, shake the dust out of the covers we wrap around our bodies, and in a thousand old and new ways, guide whoever is willing to show up and pay attention to a fresh experience of being human. (171)

This is one of the finest descriptions of transformation I have read.

Virtually every page of Cultural Creatives makes the sounds of nature spirituality, the grace of Mother Earth, the need for rites of passage and strong community, the importance of Elders and their wisdom, and the promise of the future. All are integral parts of Wicca and the NeoPagan movement. To see the world in terms of a Whole, to note interconnections between realities modernity views as discreet - these are elements of the NeoPagan worldview, and from this worldview emerges specific values and actions – an ethos – perhaps designed by Earth itself to sustain humankind as a viable and prosperous species. It is partially by the path of the spirit and its transcendence that transformation from modernity to a new age will occur. That is the position of many Cultural Creatives, and that is the position taken in this thesis.

The phenomena of NeoPaganism and Cultural Creatives are part of the larger movement among certain elements of the population that relates to spirituality and nature.

It is by this combination of heretofore separate realities that the various syntheses emerge, finding and supporting the wider meaning of human life on this planet. It is as though we as humans have become lost, staring like Narcissus at our own reflection, neglecting – or rather taking for granted – the nonhuman world around us. The voices of the authors and thinkers in Chapter Two indicate that academics are beginning to take note of this movement, and that Spirituality and Nature – or religion and ecology, if you prefer – is affecting an increasing number of thoughtful people in ever deeper ways.

Cultural Creatives, NeoPaganism, and a New Story

One of those deep ways is through the retelling of history and reality. When Thomas Berry spoke of a “new story,” he included a new history, one that fits the new reality. Perhaps the past never really changes, but our perceptions of it do. This change includes the history and story of the Cultural Creatives: the cosmic creation myth of the NeoPagans, the hippy bliss of the Summer of Love, and other stories of cultural renewal, personal journeying, spiritual epiphany, psychological healing, physical ecstasy, and universal growth that make up the continuing dialogue of Progressives. This thesis is mostly about a new story, a fresh mythos, and a worldview that heals the wounds and fits into the bright future of our perceived emerging potential.

Part of the new story is the power and beauty – the very possibility – of deeply transforming. Transformation includes both inner and outer aspects, individual and social. It must affect every aspect of our lives, from our purchasing habits to our social interactions. Politics, too, must change. For example, the mantra of the 20th century has been that democracy is the best form of government, and certainly it is superior to most other forms. But what comes after democracy? How do we govern ourselves in a post democratic world? If changes begin with the individual, we may ask: if democracy is

suited to a populous that possesses some limited self-discipline but also needs and even desires governance by some elected authority – from county commissioners to police to presidents - then what kind of person is next and what form of “government” will fit them? Acknowledging that democracy is, in reality, a sophisticated form of mob rule, an increasingly diverse, tolerant, and independent population might require a looser, more interdependent politics, with fewer mono-istic rules and more participation. In other words, a post democratic politics might look more like the consensus decision-making of the local co-op than a federal republic. Consensus, then, is the logical next format for collective reckoning. As our species matures, we will be ready for a more self-reliant kind of cooperative interaction. Law books will be printed on one page, understandable to a five year old.

Some Assumptions – How Cultural Creatives See History

Behind this example of “progressive social evolution” are certain assumptions. First, those humans are continually moving through a process of emergent evolution from violence, hierarchy, and oppression to peace, equality, and freedom. Accurate or not, this is how most Cultural Creatives choose to see history and the future, through a conscious mythos, a chosen story, on which to base their lives. It is a postmodern worldview, of sorts – optimistic but grounded, compassionate but not naive. It underlies the values held by most of the writers cited in this Thesis, for there is a belief that by speaking out and addressing a problem, by bothering to examine and synthesize spirituality and nature at all, a difference can be made, catastrophe averted, and/or wisdom gained towards a better world.

Another assumption is that there is an ecological crisis, chronic or acute, that must be addressed by social action. We have already glanced at this phenomenon and exposed

its importance as a stimulus to activism and as a philosophical underpinning for much of the work in spirituality and nature. Whenever there is a crisis, physical or mythical, humans tend to rise to the occasion with increased ingenuity, moral integrity, and intelligence. There is no reason to think that our times will be any different. Neither is there reason to believe the synthesis of spirituality and nature is not part of this process. If Earth needed a mechanism for self protection against unruly but vibrant life-forms, what better one than the emergence of just this sort of synthesis in growing numbers of people, leading to a transformation in the earth-human relationship to one of health and wholeness? The stimulation of empathy and compassionate values in an increasing percentage of the populous is a logical and, for the Cultural Creatives, mythological event.

Our ability to value is an essential attribute in this struggle to survive: to value life, each other, and ourselves. The future is far less in the hands of politicians, scientists, and corporate executives than in those of spiritual seekers, poets, artists, and cultural activists, despite what the (corporate) media would have us accept. There is richness inherent in the human species. We are genetically predisposed to innovation and triumph over challenge. If we truly are in the early stages of an ecological crisis, it will undoubtedly stimulate our innate survival response. What is more controversial is the possibility that thinkers in the area of spirituality and nature, including NeoPagans, are in fact evidence of and participants in that survival response hardwired into us.

One of our finest value-stimulators is our children. Almost everyone wants to see a world in which his or her great grandchildren can live. Most of us want better for future generations than we had. NeoPagans have the additional impetus of believing that they

may reincarnate to face the results of present actions. It is this awareness of and morality towards children yet unborn that serves as an example of the best of which humans are capable. The definition of “better” is also changing, however, as we collectively learn about and become aware of the rules of physical reality governing this lifetime.

Before we complete the Conclusion, let us note one concrete example of the new values of the Cultural Creatives. It comes in the form of the Earth Charter, a 2000 document developed by a non-governmental international commission. Concise enough to be printed in full in a pamphlet, the Charter represents the ethics and morals of progressives everywhere and is a grassroots encapsulation of Cultural Creative values. In 2002, there was a forum held in cities around the US and the world, linked by satellite and publicized by a colorful pamphlet, the Introductory blurb of which reads

The Earth Charter: A Declaration of Interdependence recognizes that humanity’s environmental, economic, social, cultural, ethical and spiritual aspirations are all interconnected. It came into being through an extraordinary grassroots drafting process over 12 years with thousands of people gathered in cities, villages, meeting halls, schools and in the open air to weave their shared dream for a better world. People from 78 countries created the Earth Charter. (pamphlet)

Thus is Thomas Berry’s new story expressed in its simplest terms. Written in plain terminology, this statement begins with wordplay on the US Declaration of Independence, changing it to “Interdependence.” And interdependence is another critical ingredient in the brew of ecospirituality.

Main Aims of this Thesis

This thesis is a glance forward, a call to activism, a proactive advocating of transformation. The combination of Spirituality and Nature is itself the combining of previously unrecognized categories, the admission of previously hidden commonalties and wholeness. As in virtually every aspect of life, synthesizing apparently opposing or

irreconcilably diverse elements is part of the alchemical work of the Cultural Creatives. Conclusions are, in fact, new beginnings, the inaugural address of a new world. There hardly seems to be any human undertaking more important.

The sometimes uncomfortable awareness that each of us, individually and daily, are in control of – and therefore share in the responsibility for – our present situation can be lost in the slumber of business as usual or the ethereal musings of academic life. But we are all clearly in this together and nobody is off the hook. Our lives have meaning – for good or otherwise. The existentialists were right about at least one point: we are terribly, irrevocably, and unmercifully culpable for what we do and what happens to humanity.

This truth is not cause for despair. Quite the opposite! It means we have the power of transformation, we can guide the nation, and perhaps the world, down a path of sustainability and real prosperity. It is a simple call to compassionate action. There is cause for joy and celebration every day, for as Mahatma Gandhi once noted, no dictatorship or oppression has ever managed to last. They are always defeated in the end. In fact, we are learning that what we will to choose is what, in fact, becomes reality, and when we change inside, the world around us changes correspondingly. Except for obvious physical constraints and limitations in nature, human reality is dazzlingly subjective. NeoPagans speak of the will in the context of magic, the former being the conscious and directed decision-making process that alters perception, the latter being that process in accordance with a transcendent truth, such as divinity, resulting in objective transformation. This is the open secret taught in some form by almost every religious and spiritual tradition I have encountered.

Transformation, or re-visioning, leads from known to unknown, familiar to mysterious, eliciting uncertainty and even fear in many. To boldly go into the future, to have the audacity to make a difference, this will require a different sort of courage, a strength of spirit and will, a deep and abiding compassion. And where are we headed? We acknowledged Cultural Creatives as one of the many signposts, we met some of the major academic writers and thinkers of spirituality and nature, and we learned about the NeoPagans. But can we give a name to the goal of our musings, work, activism, desires, and vision? What is the shining land on our distant horizon? Knowing that to name is to delineate and therefore limit, we may risk it anyway and name this place PostCivilization.

This is a rather sweeping conclusion, so let us arrive one step at a time. There is no doubt that the America of the early 21st century is a different place from that at the beginning of the 20th. The assumptions of the Traditionals and Moderns are coming under increasing scrutiny and criticism. Technoindustrial progress is being replaced for many by culturospiritual progress, the maturation process by which humans learn humility, compassion, and wisdom. As we noted in discussing Ishmael, it is now possible to see culture in its form as civilization as a limited and even temporary phase of the human story. Such a wider worldview can question those assumptions of civilization that seem to be harmful and deleterious while speculating on the future where these assumptions will alter to allow for upcoming needs.

PostCivilization is nothing less than the world transformed, but nothing more than has happened many times before. Have we not gone through such changes throughout the eons? From Neolithic agriculture to writing, from industrialism to the internet, deep revolutions have remade humanity – and thus the world. There were millions of years of

rich human culture before civilization, and there is no reason to think that millions more will not follow it. This after-civilization vision is what is important about the new age story: the sustainable but radically different tomorrow must be claimed and given voice through conscious mythology. Speaking the vague images of PostCivilization helps allay fear and replace it with hope.

One question we may ask is: can we attain the comfort, security, adventure, fun, and stimulation many humans need and seem to be hardwired to achieve outside a technoindustrial-scientific model? For instance, can health be maintained in ways not requiring invasive techniques, institutionalized hospitals, and all the other structures currently characterizing our “healthcare system.” In other words, are there methods and techniques other than those of science, technology, capitalism, and materialism? To ask such a question probes the unquestionable foundations of civilization and broadens the cultural and temporal context of our inquiry into new territory. It is, I submit, outside known and familiar realms that the answer to the question of survival and prosperity lays. With a hundred other examples possible, such expanded thinking is critical, and academia, being a concentrated and well-honed source of speculative energy, has a definite responsibility to foster and refine these questions.

Importance of Study of Spirituality and Nature

What I am suggesting is that spirituality and nature as a discipline of study has an important role to play in the making of the new myth and the practical speculative theories and methods with which a sustainable and prosperous future Earth community can be fostered and maintained. NeoPagans, Cultural Creatives, and other groups are all working in the same direction for the same general goal. I also submit that the very nature of such study must be accomplished on a wider canvas of experience and

expression than Traditional and Modern academic constraints may allow. The discipline itself tends to transcend its own boundaries. By combining the transcendent potentialities and transformative power of spirituality and spirituality with the Earthy, grounded, practical needs of our physical beings in nature, we may unlock a hitherto unrecognized door that leads us onward into an imperfect but beautiful new age.

Coming Full Circle

We may now rejoin the coven assembled in the forest on Mabon eve at the beginning of the thesis. We watch as they dance naked under the dappled moonlight, ancient rhythms echoing through the trees. There is magic in the starlight, peace in the sway of pine and oak, energy in the cool ground. The High Priest and Priestess stand at the North, raise their hands to the sky, intone one of the few poetic expressions of NeoPaganism accepted by most practitioners: The Charge of the Goddess.

“Listen to the Words of the Great Mother,” the High Priestess intones, “Who was of old called Artemis, Astarte, Diana, Melusine, Aphrodite, Cerridwen, Dana, Arianrhod, Isis, Bride, and by many other Names:

Whenever you have need of anything, once in the month, and better it be when the Moon is Full, then shall you gather in some secret place and adore the Spirit of Me, Who am Queen of All Witches. There shall you gather, you who are fain to learn all Magick, yet have not yet won its deepest secrets: to these will I teach things that are yet unknown.

And you shall be free from slavery; and as a sign that you are really free, you shall be naked in your rites. And you shall dance, sing, feast, make music and love, all in My Praise. For Mine is the Ecstasy of the Spirit, and Mine also is Joy on Earth, for My Law is Love unto all beings.

I am the Gracious Goddess, Who gives the Gift of Joy unto the heart of man: on Earth, I give the Knowledge of the Spirit Eternal; and beyond death, I give peace, and freedom, and reunion with those who have gone before. Nor do I demand sacrifice, for behold: I am the Mother of All Living, and My Love is poured out upon the Earth.”

Then the High Priest begins, his voice echoing among the trees:

“Hear the Words of the Star Goddess, She in the Dust of Whose Feet are the Hosts of Heaven, Whose Body encircles the Universe:

I, Who am the Beauty of the Green Earth, and the White Moon amongst the Stars, and the Mystery of the Waters, and the Desire of the heart of man, I call unto your soul: "Arise! And come unto Me!"

For I am the Soul of Nature, Who gives Life to the Universe: from Me all things proceed, and unto Me all things must return. And before My Face, which is beloved of gods and human kind, your innermost Divine Self shall be enfolded in the Rapture of the Infinite.

Let My Worship be within the heart that rejoices, for behold: all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals. And therefore let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honor and humility, mirth and reverence within you.

And you who think to seek for Me, know your seeking and yearning shall avail not, unless you know the Mystery: that if that which you seek you find not within you, you will never find it without.

For behold, I have been with you from the beginning; and I am That which is attained at the end of Desire.”

The Priest and Priestess end by saying, “Blessed Be.” The assembled repeat, “Blessed Be.” Then there is drumming and dancing around the fire, the gathered moving faster and faster until the fire begins to twist and curl around, sparks flying up into the darkness above. Suddenly, the drumming stops and everyone touches the earth with their hands, releasing the energy, back to the Mother from whence it came.

“In the name of Father God, Mother Goddess, and Holy Earth,” the High Priestess speaks at last, “Oh elements of earth, fire, water, and air; oh spirits that dwell within and all around, may there be peace and love between us, now and forever. So Mote It Be!”

The gathered repeat, “So Mote It Be.” Everyone sings, “May the circle be open, but unbroken. May the love of the Goddess be ever in you heart. Merry meet and merry part, and merry meet again.” There are smiles and hugs all around. The feast is gathered

up, the fire put out amidst white steam, sacred implements carried back to the house, people talking, laughing, glancing back at the dark Circle where the Sabbat drama has been played out once again, again since the beginning, for a million years. The Old Gods remember the primal times when humankind lived in their hands, hunting, gathering, and foraging. It is that energy that reawakens when it is needed. The Hopi say that the spirits of the buffalo and the many Native Americans killed in the North American holocaust will return, are returning, in the bodies of White people. That is why there are so many environmentalists, NeoPagans, and academics working with spirit and nature. The Earth is calling them to Her aid. The energies are gathered once more, spreading across the globe, unfolding like the lotus flower. It is the long beginning of healing, rebirth, and renewal. It is the new age of our dreams brought forth with sweat and toil and the most difficult and elusive concept of all: love.

In terms of the synthesis of spirituality and nature, and its potential as a transformational integration, NeoPaganism is the most powerful and direct religious tradition. That is, it incorporates into its core tenets, fundamental beliefs, and intimate activism, the Earth as a living, even divine, being which is the source of human (and all) life and energy, as well as the focus of spiritual devotion.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Paul Chase MoonOak was born in Miami, Florida. He graduated from Miami Springs Senior High and a few years later received his Associate of Arts degree from Miami-Dade Community College. In 1980 he married Ducie Corrales, and together they had two sons, Arian (1984) and Tammen (1987). The family moved to Gainesville, Florida in 1986 but returned to Miami, Florida, to birth Tam. In 1990, Paul earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in religion from the University of Florida. During the 1990s he worked at the Alachua County Library District, wrote a self-published book, *Spiritus Novus*, and was introduced to NeoPaganism. In 1992 he became a member of The Church of All Worlds, a NeoPagan organization. He began attending NeoPagan gatherings, and was official bard from 1995-2001. In 1997, he was ordained as a minister in CAW and continues to perform various ceremonies and rites of passage. He will receive his Master of Arts degree in Religion May 2003.