

# THE BIBLE AND ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY

BY WALTER B. GULICK

*"To reflect upon the integrity of the land apart from human use would require an abstract quality of thought not characteristic of the biblical worldview. In sum, nature in the Bible is generally either regarded as a resource, or it fades into the background while, in the foreground, the significant drama of history is played out. In order to explore how the Bible might serve as a normative source for an ecological spirituality, an alternative must be found to focusing directly on how nature is portrayed in biblical passages. A promising direction is to reflect upon some of the qualities of an ecological consciousness or an ecological spirituality and then to see to what extent the Bible supports these qualities."*

**T**HE rise of Earth Day to central attention in the media witnesses to an unprecedented consciousness in America of the importance of the integrity of our natural environment. Sensitivity to ecological issues has certainly been abetted by the work of some theologians,<sup>1</sup> but it seems fair to say that the emergence of widespread ecological consciousness is not something that can properly be attributed to Christianity or to knowledge of the Bible. Indeed, one event leading to the establishment of the first Earth Day was the publication of Lynn White's famous essay indicting the Christian tradition for its complicity in creating the environmental crisis.<sup>2</sup> White singled out the biblical view that humans are given dominion over nature by God as a chief cause of Western exploitation and degradation of nature. In practice, stewardship over nature, he said, decays into self-serving manipulation of the natural world. White called for a new theological vision, taking St. Francis of Assisi as its source of inspiration.

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<sup>1</sup>A recent annotated bibliography of theological contributions to ecological issues is found in Jay B. McDaniel, *Earth, Sky, Gods and Mortals: Developing an Ecological Spirituality* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990). This rather brief selection is weighted in favor of contributions from a process orientation.

<sup>2</sup>Lynn White, "The Historic Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* (March 10, 1967), since included in many anthologies.

The years since White's call have seen a rich profusion of writings in ecological spirituality, many influenced by Eastern, as well as Christian, thought, by scientific sensitivity, as well as theological reconstruction. But after a flurry of writings seeking either to extend White's condemnation of the Bible's role in creating ecological problems, or to exonerate it from White's charges, the Bible has tended to fade into the background of the discussion. This is unfortunate, for we thereby neglect resources that can contribute important insights to an emerging ecological spirituality. Perhaps times are changing. The World Council of Churches adopted as its General Assembly theme "Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation." In addition, the recently published *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* features several articles that address the Bible in relation to environmental issues.<sup>3</sup>

Some years ago John Cobb wrote that "we should seek within our tradition those submerged elements whose new prominence would give us the vision or consciousness we need."<sup>4</sup> I attempt such a retrieval in this essay, and I rejoice if this effort is part of a broader movement.<sup>5</sup> I will show how several significant strands within the Bible can be integrated to form a vision that both protects and encourages Christian ecological spirituality.

## I

Does the Bible say anything explicitly about nature that might be ecologically helpful now? The natural world is understood as God's creation, but I know of no biblical passages that urge any special respect. "Love your earthly mother" is not a biblical sentiment. Rather, natural phenomena are seen as one medium through which God's will for humans is revealed—through earthquake, wind, and fire; through droughts and precipitation; through a rainbow or a star. Nature offers a rich resource for metaphors: it provides lions and lambs, wildernesses and paradise, cedars of Lebanon and a faithless fig tree. Nature and its products are often seen as valuable, but for human use. Thus, Walter Brueggemann proclaims, "Land is a central, if not *the central theme* of biblical faith."<sup>6</sup> The land, however, is but a type of natural resource for the people of Israel. Land is nature as expropri-

<sup>3</sup>*Liberating Life*, edited by Charles Birch, William McDaniel, and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990).

<sup>4</sup>John B. Cobb *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology* (Beverly Hills: Bruce, 1972), p. 48.

<sup>5</sup>Paul Santmire mines the Bible and the history of Christian thought in order to develop resources for an ecologically sensitive theology [see *The Travail of Nature* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985)]. He suggests that three root metaphors concerning nature are evident in the Christian tradition: nature as a symbol of spiritual ascent, the fecundity of nature as a sign of God's overflowing goodness, and migration to a good land (here linking up with Brueggemann's emphasis on the land). Santmire is quite properly concerned that the theological doctrine of redemption not be envisaged in a fashion that involves an escape from nature, so that the importance of the creation is undermined. As a whole, the direction of his work is somewhat different than the project of articulating a biblically based ecological spirituality undertaken here.

<sup>6</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 3.

ated for raising crops and flocks, as a site for building homes and cities, and especially as a place that can provide a sense of identity and pride. To reflect upon the integrity of the land apart from human use would require an abstract quality of thought not characteristic of the biblical worldview. In sum, nature in the Bible is generally either regarded as a resource, or it fades into the background while, in the foreground, the significant drama of history is played out.

In order to explore how the Bible might serve as a normative source for an ecological spirituality, an alternative must be found to focusing directly on how nature is portrayed in biblical passages. A promising direction is to reflect upon some of the qualities of an ecological consciousness or an ecological spirituality and then to see to what extent the Bible supports these qualities. To contribute to any biblically based spirituality, however, the supportive biblical passages must be used in a way that is respectful of the integrity of the text's meaning as a whole. Little is accomplished by arbitrary proof-texting.

Barry Commoner offers four laws of ecology, which have the advantage of summarizing an ecological consciousness in pithy and memorable terms: "Everything is connected to everything else;" "everything must go somewhere;" "nature knows best;" and "there is no such thing as a free lunch."<sup>7</sup> But only the third law, "nature knows best," has a normative dimension, and as Holmes Rolston points out, following nature is a most ambiguous imperative. Rolston helpfully identifies seven ways of interpreting the injunction to follow nature, especially affirming following nature in an axiological and a tutorial sense.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Commoner's version of an ecological consciousness remains rooted in a scientific world view, which is not an obvious candidate for linkage with biblical sensibility or spirituality. Any version of an ecological consciousness would seem to require a great deal of supplementation in order for it to qualify as an ecological spirituality.

Jay McDaniel is one who explicitly sets forth an ecological spirituality in his recent *Earth, Sky, Gods, and Mortals*.<sup>9</sup> However, his vision is so influenced by worldwide spiritual traditions and contemporary developments in science, philosophy, and theology that it is mainly of incidental help in the search for biblical contributions to an ecological spirituality.

Those who earlier turned directly to the Bible for support for an ecological spirituality generally have found that they have to amend what they find. Harold Schilling makes this suggestion: "The biblical ethic has had an essentially two-fold focus, calling for love of God and love of neighbor. It should now become threefold, demanding also love

<sup>7</sup>See Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man and Technology* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), pp. 29–41.

<sup>8</sup>See Holmes Rolston, *Philosophy Gone Wild: Essays in Environmental Ethics* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1986), Chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup>McDaniel, *Earth, Sky, Gods and Mortals*, pp. 182–185.

of nature.”<sup>10</sup> Rene Dubos suggests that the ten commandments should be extended to number eleven: “Thou shalt strive for environmental quality.”<sup>11</sup> H. Paul Santmire seeks to extend the metaphor of the Kingdom of God so as “to comprehend the whole natural world. We then have a personalistic conceptual framework, which allows us to do justice to that biblical picture of a Divine history with nature.”<sup>12</sup> It is not surprising, considering the radical cultural changes from biblical times to the present, that each of these approaches modifies the biblical record.

## II

Rather than augmenting or altering the biblical views, can an ecological spirituality be drawn from a synthesis of biblical insights? I believe such is possible. To accomplish this, we need to become clearer about (1) what is meant by spirituality—what state of being we are looking for—and (2) what minimal components seem essential to an ecological spirituality.

(1) I am using “spirituality” in Tillich’s sense of the term, that is, as indicating “the unity of power and meaning” in the depths of a person’s being.<sup>13</sup> “Spirit” connotes more than the rational, passionate, and imaginative aspects of human life, although it is dependent upon them. Spirituality is that dimension of inner life that is attuned to the things that are understood to be most valuable in life; it motivates and guides significant activity. An ecological spirituality, then, is attuned to the worth of the nexus of nature. It would motivate and guide action in relation to concern for the way that actions would impinge upon all conceivable aspects of existence. I will propose four components of an ecological spirituality, which jointly empower meaningful activity on behalf of the whole natural world. Our basic concern will be with the biblical roots of this spirituality, rather than with specifying what is meant by “nature” or outlining the particular actions that arguably derive from such a spirituality.

(2) What are the four components deemed essential to an ecological spirituality? First, a recognition of the interconnectedness and interdependence of things in the natural world is crucial. Such a recognition can be rooted in either a religious or a scientific vision. Events in the world can be viewed as the product of spiritual forces capable of being read by those who are spiritually awake and adept. The spiritual forces may be seen as plural, as in animism, or as the product of a single force, as in monotheism. Typically, however, religious interpretations of

<sup>10</sup>Harold Schilling, “The Whole Earth Is the Lord’s: Toward a Holistic Ethic,” *Earth Might Be Fair: Reflections on Ethics, Religion, and Ecology*, edited by Ian G. Barbour (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 109.

<sup>11</sup>Rene Dubos, *A God Within* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972), p. 166.

<sup>12</sup>Paul Santmire, *Brother Earth: Nature, God and Ecology in Time of Crisis* (New York: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1970), p. 103.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 24.

natural and cultural events depend upon the metaphor of human motivation in explaining why things occur as they do. "The gods were angry or jealous." When such religious explanations are used, the accounts of the relationships between things in the natural world reveal more about the interpreters and their motivations than about that which is interpreted. Thus, such highly touted spiritual traditions as those found among Native Americans must be considerably refined before they can be adequately assimilated into our complex, scientifically comprehended world. The same can be said about much Christian theology.

Ecology itself has evolved as a discipline expressive of scientific vision, and its particular genius is its ability to reveal patterns of interconnectedness within natural complexes. Commoner's four laws represent one synopsis of this ecological perspective. In such scientific understanding of interconnectedness, there is liable to be far less subjective projection than in religious visions of connectedness. An ecological spirituality, then, must be resolutely ecological as well as spiritual. Consequently, the first dimension of an ecological spirituality will be grounded in the best scientific ecological knowledge. The second, third, and fourth dimensions, in contrast, tend to emphasize qualities and structures of the human spirit rather than characteristics of the way nature is organized.

Second, sensitivity to ecological interconnectedness leads to a recognition of the fragility of most environmental systems. This, in turn, helps elicit a consideration of the forces that threaten ecological richness. In response to this threat, an ecological spirituality will include a commitment to protect the natural world. Thus, the second aspect of an ecological spirituality is oriented around ethical concerns. Philosophically, it is expressive of a certain interest of practical reason; theologically, it seeks out covenantal protection of God's created order.

Third, the commitment to protect the natural environment must itself be grounded in an appreciative affirmation of the richness of the web of life and indeed the grandeur of the whole cosmos. This appreciation arises out of experiences of the capacity of nature to speak to humans in ways that evoke wonder, elicit awe, and generate self-imposed restraint. Natural beings and systems are thereby appreciated as valuable in and for themselves, not simply seen in terms of how they contribute to human welfare. Holmes Rolston articulates a notion of value that encompasses far more than human choice. "Nature," he writes, "is a generative process to which we want to relate ourselves and by this to find relationships to other creatures. Value includes far more than a simplistic human-interest satisfaction. Value is a multifaceted idea with structures that root in natural sources."<sup>14</sup> An ecological spirituality will recognize and honor natural worlds which stretch beyond personal or human comprehension.

<sup>14</sup>Rolston, *Philosophy Gone Wild*, p. 121.

Fourth, no ecological spirituality will be complete without a resolve that issues in actions on behalf of those aspects of the natural world that one most appreciates. Not only is ecological understanding and appreciation of nature required; one must have the power actively to live up to one's moral commitments to protect the environment. The Christian tradition understands well the dynamics involved in empowerment to do the good.

To sum up, the essential components of an ecological spirituality include an ecologically-based approach, which, since it has been discovered in recent times, is not to be sought in the Bible, plus three spiritual elements, which will be the subject of our further inquiry. The first three components deal primarily with issues of ecological meaning and value, the fourth primarily with the issue of power, so that conjointly they furnish that "unity of power and meaning" that comprises spirituality. Within biblical literature we will seek sources for the appreciation of the goodness of nature, commitment to include protection of nature in a comprehensive and ethical vision, and personal spiritual power to live the ecologically good life.<sup>15</sup> Notice that by seeking out spiritual resources from the Bible, we are not caught in the bind of merely exploring what biblical passages expressly say about nature. Christian spiritual resources are grounded in self-God relationships, which inform and illuminate significant portions of the biblical record. I will seek to show that an ecological spirituality can successfully be grounded in a combination of what I shall call the covenantal, cosmological, and metanoic interpretations of the self-God relationship.

### III

The covenantal relationship is so pervasive in the Bible that it is often thought to be the essential way God relates to humans. Certainly, many theologians of the Old Testament have followed Eichrodt in stressing the centrality of the covenant to any insightful interpretation of the text; the very names Old Testament and New Testament bear witness to the overriding significance of successive covenantal understandings. As Holmes Rolston points out, the rainbow covenant that God establishes with Noah includes the animals within its purview (see Genesis 9:9,10).<sup>16</sup> Rather than exploring the various covenants, however, we shall seek out the spiritual meaning of the definitive covenant in the Hebrew Bible, the Sinai covenant as presented in Exodus.

<sup>15</sup>The ecologically good life is grounded in a recognition of the integrity of creation. In "Liberating Life: A Report to the World Council of Churches," group of theologians offered this suggestive definition of the *integrity of creation*, a definition that includes both ecological and spiritual insights: "The value of all creatures in and for themselves, for one another, and for God, and their interconnectedness in a diverse whole that has unique value for God, together constitute the integrity of creation" (*Liberating Life*, p. 290).

<sup>16</sup>See Holmes Rolston, "Wildlife and Wetlands: A Christian Perspective," *Church and Society* 30:4 [March/April, 1990], p. 16.

At Sinai, Yahweh is revealed as the Lord of history who has brought the people of Israel out of slavery and who promises them a land if they are obedient to the divine demands. "If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5, 6). Yahweh is the sovereign of both time and space. The lands of the world, and indeed all nature, are at Yahweh's disposal to be dispensed to the people of Israel according to the extent that they are obedient to the terms of the Torah. Nature is thus a resource, a potential punishment or gift in the unfolding of the course of history. Yahweh uses polluted river water, flies and gnats, hail and thunderstorms, cattle plague and boils in punishing the heart-hardened pharaoh. A barren wilderness tests, and a land of milk and honey rewards, the children of Israel. The spiritual demand of this covenantal relationship is therefore legal and ethical; its motivations are gratitude, reward, and punishment, and its temporal modes are memory, promise, and fulfillment.

When one examines the legal content of the Torah, one finds that it regulates relationships between people (and between people and God) so as to establish a just society in which privileges are protected but exploitation is prohibited. Thus the covenant establishes a publicly known standard by which to secure moral behavior. Priest and prophet, Yahwist and Deuteronomist alike, judge events and people in light of this standard. Many are they who experience the guilt of falling short of the standard. Hence, the second creation story, with its account of disobedience and punishment, eventually comes to be used as a paradigm to assess those who attempt to fulfill the law and who fail. As a result of the first human disobedience, the ground is cursed so that it yields thorns and thistles. Nature is viewed and judged from a highly anthropocentric perspective. It is to be managed either by God or by God's representatives on earth: human beings.

#### IV

If the spiritual resources of the Bible were limited to the covenantal perspective, then Western dominance of nature would be mitigated by no countervailing tradition within Christianity. But humankind is related to God directly through the creation, according to some texts, and this cosmological relationship sponsors an appreciation of nature lacking in texts expressive of covenantal conceptuality. Especially in the wisdom literature one encounters the notion that God's character is revealed in and through nature as well as through historical events, the Torah, the prophets, and different techniques of divination. In Proverbs 8:22-31, for example, Yahweh is said to create the world through wisdom as an intermediary. When humans learn the ways of nature, they gain insight into the divine mind. In most texts, cosmological wisdom is not set in opposition to covenantal revelation (see Jeremiah 33:25-26, for instance). Rather the understanding of God

through natural beings or through the creation is viewed as one among several avenues through which the divine will for humans is made known.

There is an exception to the happy co-existence of cosmological and covenantal understandings of God. In one extended text, the preference for a cosmological relation to God, mediated by nature, is persuasively, although not unambiguously, argued. If I read the poetic verses of Job correctly, they challenge the authority of a covenantal interpretation of God and replace it with a cosmological relationship.

In contrast to the super-pious person presented in the prose of the first two chapters of Job, the poetry offers us a picture of a distraught person whose understanding of God's ways had been thoroughly called into question. The prose prologue makes it clear that Job has lived a blameless life. He follows the commandments of the Torah completely; he even offers sacrifices on behalf of his children in case they have sinned. In the prose portion of the story, the fairy tale, Job never doubts the faithful God of the covenant, even after his several severe misfortunes. The poetry is far different. Here Job questions why he was born and demands an explanation of his suffering from God. His friends offer him the same reward and punishment view he has long accepted and which now makes no sense to him. He can no longer find any meaning in their explanations or in the covenant itself.

The nature of God's answer to Job has long been a source of contention among interpreters of the book. Some argue that God was merely testing Job's faith, which if it were heartfelt, would not depend upon the rewards of the good life he had led. Others emphasize the presumptuousness of Job to challenge the ways of God when Job's knowledge is so limited compared to God's. Both these interpretations do not challenge the covenantal interpretation of Job's relation to God. One problem with each of these interpretations, though, is that neither really takes account of the character of God's response to Job. God offers Job a panoramic vision of the creation. Why does God respond to Job by telling Job of his creation when in his poetic discourses Job makes it abundantly clear that he understands the creative power of God revealed in nature? Indeed, Job understands the creation in terms remarkably close to the way God gives answer to Job (see, for instance, Job 12:7-9 and especially Job 26:7-14).

In interpreting God's answer, it is helpful to notice that God answers Job out of a whirlwind. This is a natural phenomenon, of course, but less dramatic than an earthquake or a fire. It is a dust-bearing wind that, paradoxically, can be seen; it is therefore more suggestive of an immanent, present being than is an unseen wind blowing across the waters, transcendent and mysterious while yet powerful. Moreover, a whirlwind turns things around—perhaps even one's assumptions about the nature of God or the godliness of nature.

The language of Job 38:2-4 at first glance suggests that it be spoken by a loud, confrontational, indignant voice. "Who is this that darkens



counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" But a whirlwind spinning across a field is not a tornado; it whispers. Perhaps the most appropriate tone for this passage is that of a whisper of recognition.<sup>17</sup> In turning away from the voice of his friends to the vision of the whirlwind, Job becomes a visionary, one who sees and understands. No longer does he discuss the creation as if by rote; now he participates in the creation by sight. He imaginatively tours the creation and recognizes that it displays a logic beyond that of good and evil or reward and punishment. God created the ostrich, which lays its eggs on the ground where they may be crushed. He created Behemoth and Leviathan, monsters each. Job's experience of the creation elicits the climactic insight of the poetry: He states, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5, 6). God, the Lord of the covenant, was known by hearing, by tradition; God, the Lord encountered in nature, is known by seeing, and this seeing leads to repentance and conversion. Job is in fact converted from a covenantal to a cosmological manner of apprehending God. The author of the poetry of Job seems to be saying that we directly experience God in nature, and this encounter distances our concerns, even our concerns about why we suffer. In the face of the vastness of creation, our sufferings matter little. It is not just that the creation is immense; it is that it is of immense value, even though that value cannot be articulated adequately in human terms.

The book of Job shows how the experience of God in nature has the power to dissolve our painful frustrations concerning how the world is treating us. If nature reliably has such a power, then clearly it is experienced as a force for good, not merely the neutral process set forth by the scientific world view. To put the point this way still treats nature as good *for us*. But there is a quality of discovery in Job's new vision. God and nature and even goodness are revealed as other than Job expected.<sup>18</sup> In particular, nature is known as good in itself beyond the way it affects humans. God can affirm the ostrich, a foolish bird from a human perspective. Nowhere is the inherent goodness of the creation articulated more clearly than in the first creation story. The Priestly Writer speaks out of a genuine appreciation for nature as God's good creation. Such appreciation is an essential component of an ecological spirituality, and in the cosmological writings it finds its clearest biblical expression.

<sup>17</sup>I am indebted to Henry Bugbee for his way of reading Job in general and particularly for his suggestion that Job 38 be read as a breezy whisper. The paper has also benefited from the critiques of Holmes Rolston, David Strong, and Robert Ratner.

<sup>18</sup>With respect to the doctrine of God, Thomas G. Long states the insight of the book of Job well: "This great text stands over against the prevalent religious impulse to fabricate a wishful picture of the world, to imagine the sort of God who would rule benignly over such a world, and then to bow down in worship before this projection of our own sense of moral order" (THEOLOGY TODAY 45 [April, 1988], p. 6).

## V

If a person were influenced solely by a cosmological relation to God, it is uncertain whether that person's concern for the environment would result in effective public action. To be sure, the recognition of the value of nature can galvanize a desire to protect it, and this can in turn stimulate the forging of a covenant. Thus, I believe the cosmological tradition can be the living source of an ecological spirituality.<sup>19</sup> But without the influence of other modes of spirituality, a cosmological mode can also be taken in the direction of an escapist aestheticism or an impotent mysticism. Nature can be treated as a source for personal therapy, a place to which to retreat when everyday life with other people becomes oppressive. Then nature is made into a commodity and has no greater claim to protection than anything else that provides people with pleasure or relief.

If the natural world is to be adequately protected by an ecological spirituality, nature needs more than the appreciation provided by the cosmological perspective. It needs the protection that is found in the ethical vision that undergirds or arises out of a covenantal accord. But even this is not enough. Reliance upon a covenant to determine right and wrong places demands upon selves that almost inevitably lead to failure and guilt. Moreover, a covenant provides one with a platform upon which to stand in judgment of all else, including nature. Consequently, an ecological spirituality dependent upon just covenantal and cosmological relationships to God would still be unstable and problematic in some respects. A further spiritual dimension is required if the commitment to nature is to be vital and reliable. A source of spiritual power is needed. In Romans, Paul writes:

The creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation; but we ourselves (Romans 8:20–23).

Paul seems to be saying that the redemption of a fallen nature is tied up with the redemption of humans. For Paul, human salvation is connected with accepting on faith God's gift of Christ as a ransom for our sins. How could nature possibly be redeemed by such an apparently personal act of faith, and what does all this have to do with ecological spirituality?

<sup>19</sup>Through the ages the cosmological tradition has certainly often been the inspiration for theological construction. A notable current example of a cosmologically oriented theologian is Thomas Berry. Following Teilhard, he argues that the "universe, the solar system, and the planet earth in themselves and in their evolutionary emergence constitute for the human community the primary revelation of that ultimate mystery whence all things emerge into being" ("Twelve Principles for Reflecting on the Universe and the Role of the Human in the Universe Process," *Cross Currents* 37:2.3 [Summer/Fall, 1987], p. 216).

The central problem that Paul wrestles with is how he might find the power to do the good. "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Romans 7:15). A person may wish to work for the protection of nature but find that the inertia of life leads to a continual falling short of that ideal. In looking out for the welfare of self and family, one may continually compromise the ecologically sound life-style to which one aspires. To paraphrase Paul, who can deliver one from this shortsighted way of living?

For Paul, only God can save one from the bondage to sin, which is expressed in impotence to do the good. One must first acknowledge that one is a sinner, ecologically. Then, one must look for sources of assistance beyond one's rational center, the will. For one's rational center is inevitably self-regarding rather than truly committed to God. Paul believed that God, acting through Christ, broke the law of sin in the form of an obedient servant, obedient even to death. In searching for escape from the domination of sin, one must give up willful struggling and obediently identify with Christ as a central guide to spiritual living. Then, one is released from the power of sin and experiences the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. One lives no longer by the egocentrism of the flesh, but is empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the good. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Clearly the fruits of the Spirit, which Paul enumerates, are qualities that would enhance an ecological spirituality. Were all human actions to be imbued with the fruits of the Spirit, then the creation would be set free from its bondage to human exploitation. Indeed, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit represents the third and final dimension of the self-God relationship needed for an ecological spirituality. Through the graceful presence of the Spirit, one's self-centered consciousness is transformed and one becomes a new being responsive to the needs of one's surroundings. H. Richard Niebuhr spoke of such spiritual transformation as *metanoia*, "the reinterpretation of all our interpretations of life and death."<sup>20</sup> Thus, we may call this the metanoic dimension of the self-God relationship.

## VI

Can the covenantal, cosmological, and metanoic dimensions of the self-God relationship cohere in a stable spiritual form? A person need not simultaneously and continuously manifest these three types of spirituality. Indeed, as indicated in the traditional Christian doctrine of sanctification, the spiritual life has long been understood as marked by comings and goings, by phases and developments rather than by consistent presence. However, the three dimensions of the self-God relationship do manifest a trinitarian form, which suggests that an ecological spirituality is harmonious with traditional theological doc-

<sup>20</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 143.

trine. God the Father, the creator, is known via the cosmological tradition.<sup>21</sup> Christ the Son, the redeemer, is a moral model, one who lives out the terms of the new covenant. God the Holy Spirit empowers a person through *metanoia* to do the good, to manifest the divine presence. Because the ecological spirituality has been constructed to encompass different modes of self-God relationship, and because these modes incorporate complementary and compatible forms of spirituality—indeed forms comprising the Christian doctrine of the trinity—this ecological spirituality is deeply rooted in the soil of theological tradition. It would embody as much stability and coherence as the Christian comprehension of God embodies.

While our idea of ecological spirituality has been drawn from biblical sources, I do not think its insights are necessarily limited to those who turn to the Bible for inspiration. Indeed, one can imagine experiences that would contribute to a secular analogue of this type of spirituality, just as some of the substance abuse recovery programs utilize the form of Paul's spirituality without necessarily referring to the Christ mythos so essential to Paul's personal experience. Might not the scientifically-based, but potentially enthralling, insights of ecological interconnectedness be fused with something like Job's experience of God in nature to produce a powerful sense of awe concerning the way each of us is placed in nature? Do we not feel a need to cherish and protect this sacred gift of natural order? Does not this felt sense of appreciation for the natural world roughly parallel Paul's sense of appreciation for the gift of Christ? If so, then one may indwell this awe-filled spirit of appreciation much as Paul dwelt in Christ. One would thereby experience *metanoia*; nature-regard would displace self-regard from the central position in decision making, and one's actions would express the fruits of an ecological spirit.

Alas, too often a sense of appreciation for nature, commitment to moral standards, and psychological dynamics of inspiration and empowerment are experienced as isolated moments of daily living. They are not fused into an ecologically sensitive way of life. As Alasdair MacIntyre has argued so forcefully, the discipline provided by traditional practices is what contributes most effectively to moral accomplishment. Of course, a tradition may itself contain elements that work at cross purposes. It is my intention to identify and articulate

<sup>21</sup>While I use traditional trinitarian language here ("God the Father"), Sallie McFague has made it clear that when God is reimagined as a creator-mother, this can have consequences fully supportive of the thrust of this article. "The mother-God as creator is necessarily judge, at the very basic level of condemning as the primary (though not the only) sin the inequitable distribution of basic necessities for the continuation of life in its many forms. In this view, sin is not 'against God,' the pride and rebellion of an inferior against a superior, but 'against the body,' the refusal to be part of an ecological whole whose continued existence and success depend upon a recognition of the interdependence and interrelatedness of all species" ("Models of God for an Ecological, Evolutionary Era: God as Mother of the Universe," *Physics, Philosophy and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding*, edited by Robert John Russell, et al. (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory, 1988, p. 262).

how the biblical tradition can contribute to a holistic spiritual identity attuned to ecological issues, an identity not fragmented by contrary purposes, but one supportive of the different dimensions of an ecological consciousness.

Because many powerful persons, institutions, and structures continue to exploit nature in ecologically unacceptable ways, those inspired by an ecological spirituality need to continue to work to develop and to gain support for an ecological covenant that places limits on thoughtless human action. This covenant will have to address political as well as scientific and religious concerns. Perhaps, now, it is clearer how certain biblical traditions can develop, support, and even mandate the practices of healthy ecological spirituality. And perhaps it is also clear why even biblical traditions are not enough—why the deepest commitment requires a Job-like appreciation of the value of nature reenforced by spiritual power to act on its behalf.

