



PAGANISM, NEW SPIRITUALITY AND CHRISTIANITY: LOOKING FOR A HOLISTIC ECOLOGICAL ETHIC

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Introduction

In 1966, Lynn White Jr. delivered a lecture entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis."¹ This lecture has gone a long way in promoting the idea that Christianity is responsible for the current ecological crisis, and has repeatedly been quoted by those seeking to establish its cause.² White wrote, "Certainly the forms of our thinking and language have largely ceased to be Christian, but to my eye the substance often remains amazingly akin to that of the past."³ What White means here is that though many would affirm that we live in "the post-Christian age," most of the influence of Christianity is still intact. And it is precisely this influence that White believes is the main culprit behind the ecological crisis.

While it should be confessed that Christians have not by any means led the way in seeking a way out of our present crisis, it is simplistic to place all of the responsibility on Christians. Certainly factors such as capitalism, greed,⁴ the progress of science and technology⁵, and the effects of war⁶ need to be taken into account as influences which have contributed to our present ecological crisis.

One of the first Christian responses to Lynn White was from Christian philosopher and environmentalist Francis Schaeffer. He acknowledged the extent of the environmental problem, and based his Christian response on a "theology that recognized both our shared creatureliness (he was not ashamed to speak of the Earth as "our fair sister") and the unique role of human beings as creatures responsible to God."⁷

A common response to the perceived belief that Christianity has no provision for an ecological ethic is to look to the Pagan community or

forms of New Spirituality for the answer. As Loren Wilkinson has written, "Many environmentalists believe that some of the components of New Age thinking provide a better foundation than Christianity upon which to build an ethic for living on the earth."⁸ This belief is due in no small part to White's influence. In his words, "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."⁹

From a Christian ethical perspective, this essay will evaluate such claims in light of what the Bible teaches. We will then seek to provide a Christian ecological ethic, and conclude by suggesting several methods of social change. First, however, we need to develop an understanding of commonly used ethical frameworks of ecology.

1. Ethical Ecological Views.

Carolyn Merchant, who is Professor of Environmental History at the University of Berkeley, proposes that there are three main types of ethical views that underlie the political positions of individuals, corporations, government agencies, and environmentalists who struggle over land and natural resource uses. These include what she terms *egocentric*, *homocentric*, and *ecocentric* ethical positions. They are viewed as the culmination of associated political, religious, and ethical trends that have developed in western culture since the seventeenth century.¹⁰

According to Merchant, the rise of *laissez faire* capitalism and the mechanistic worldview in the seventeenth century, as well as the ethic of present mainstream industrial capitalism are associated with an egocentric ethic, or an ethic grounded in the self.¹¹ This doesn't appear to be purely negative for Merchant. She writes, "An egocentric ethic's orientation does not derive from selfishness or narcissism, but rather is based on a philosophy that treats individuals (or private corporations) as separate, but equal social atoms."¹²

Ecological movements who have as their primary goal social justice for all people are associated with a homocentric ethic¹³, or an ethic grounded in the social good. Examples given by Merchant of such ecological movements include, social ecologists, left Greens, social and socialist ecofeminists, many Second and Third World environmentalists, and the mainstream sustainable development movement.¹⁴

Since homocentric ethics have as their goal social justice and social good, Merchant naturally sees similarities with the utilitarian ethics of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Especially in view of utilitarian ethics as it seeks to act in such a way as to ensure the greatest good for the greatest amount of people.¹⁵ She also associates homocentric ethics with Marx's goal to "better the human condition by using science and



technology to meet human needs for food, clothing, shelter, and fuel to overcome the necessities imposed by nature.¹⁶

Finally, deep ecologists, spiritual ecologists, Greens, cultural ecofeminists, organic farmers, bioregionalists, and most indigenous peoples' movements are associated with an ecocentric ethic, or an ethic grounded in the cosmos, or whole ecosystem.¹⁷

One with an ecocentric ethic holds that the whole of the environment has an intrinsic value. Whether inanimate objects such as rocks and minerals, or animate plants and animals.¹⁸ Those who hold to an ecocentric ethic claim to derive their view from the science of ecology. What is learned from ecology is applied to environmental problems as a guideline for resolving ethical dilemmas.¹⁹

Merchant states, "Ecocentric ethics also have religious and spiritual components. Deep ecology, nature religions, ecological spirituality, and process philosophy have at their roots an ecocentric value system."²⁰ Those who hold to the religious and spiritual components involved in an ecocentric ethic are typically those that claim they have a better foundation than Christianity upon which to build an ethic for living on the earth. We will now look at major aspects of these alternatives in order to provide a basis for evaluating this claim.

1.1. Pagan Approaches to Ecology.

Pagan spiritual paths, and those that come under its umbrella such as Wicca, Shamanism, and Druidry are flourishing.²¹ One of the reasons why is that Pagans advocate a nature-based or eco-spirituality. As Nevill Drury has written, "There is a widespread feeling today that native peoples the world over live their lives more closely attuned to the cycles of nature than most of us who live in large sprawling cities."²² As a result, many people "perhaps especially those who live in large sprawling cities" are looking to nature-based religions to fulfil a yearning for a spirituality that lovingly cares for and interacts with nature.

According to the prominent Pagan and University of London lecturer, Vivianne Crowley, "Paganism is a green religion. It encourages us to live in love and kinship with the natural world."²³ Furthermore, "In Paganism, the God is conceived of as operating within Nature."²⁴

One of the central principles of Pagan spiritual paths is that the Divine is present in Nature and humankind. For most Pagans there is a strong intuition that the Divine presence is tangible in the creation. Technically, Pagans have an immanent concept of the Divine. For some Pagans the immanent presence of the Divine correlates to another

concept known as *pantheism*, or the belief that the Divine is everywhere.²⁵ Although Christianity does affirm that God is both transcendent and immanent, to be true to itself Christianity cannot encompass pantheism. According to Crowley, all monotheistic religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have desanctified Nature. Furthermore,

They have moved the Divinity *upstairs*, to a spiritual and insubstantial realm. Our hearts no longer give thanks to the Goddess when the flowers bloom, when our crops thrive. We give thanks to weed killer and phosphates! Unfortunately, this so-called rational rather than reverential attitude to Nature is disastrous for our future.²⁶

Another central principle of Pagan thought is that the Divine is both female and male. Pagans believe in both Goddesses and Gods yet they understand that the Divine is beyond the limitations of gender.²⁷ Both feminine and masculine aspects of Deity impact ecological practices within Paganism. As Crowley writes, "Giving something back to the Earth in return for the life she gives us is important in Paganism and is found throughout Pagan thought."²⁸ In relation to the male Deity, two of the most well known aspects of the God are the Horned God and the Green Man. Once again from Crowley:

These aspects of Deity reflect modern Paganism's concern with maintaining our planet and our natural environment. The images of Divine as part of Nature which are conveyed by the Horned God and the Green Man are an important part of this process. They are also a recognition that we can live fulfilled and whole lives only if we acknowledge ourselves as part of Nature, not separate from it.²⁹

1.2. Gaia and Ecology.

Another component of thinking that is associated with Pagan and New Spirituality that many believe provides a better foundation than Christianity upon which to build an ethic for living on the earth is the Gaia hypothesis.³⁰

James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis first introduced the Gaia hypothesis through several papers in the mid-1970s. In 1979, Lovelock published what was to be his first book dealing with the Gaia hypothesis entitled *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*.³¹ This theory has received mixed responses from scientific and religious communities.³² For example, in 1988 the American Geophysical Union, an international association of geologists and geochemists, devoted its entire conference to discussing the Gaia hypothesis where the idea was both criticized and supported vigorously.³³ In relationship to Christians evaluating the Gaia hypothesis, Connor's caution is appropriate. He writes that we,



need to avoid a knee-jerk rejection of the entire Gaia theory. Gaia is the current consensus builder within the New Age. But the ideas underlying Gaia theory are not intrinsically evil because they carry the name of a pagan goddess.³⁴

What is Gaia? James Lovelock confesses that the concept Gaia has evolved from when it was first introduced in the 1970s until twenty-five years later when he wrote his second book on Gaia.³⁵ According to Lovelock, "Gaia is best thought of as a superorganism. These are bounded systems made up partly from living organisms and partly from nonliving structural material."³⁶ This superorganism can "regulate climate and chemistry."³⁷ Lovelock's understanding of Gaia is important, because he and Lynn Margulis originated the hypothesis. However, it would be incorrect to assume that Lovelock and Margulis necessarily agree with the interpretations that many from Pagan or New Spirituality backgrounds have in regard to Gaia.³⁸ In particular, Lovelock and Margulis do not hold to concepts of the earth's divinity as many from Pagan or New Spirituality worldviews do.

Many Pagans and others affirm that Gaia or the Earth is living. Merchant asks, "Is the earth dead or alive? The ancient cultures of east and west and the native peoples of America saw the earth as a mother, alive, active, and responsive to human action."³⁹ Yet in the last three hundred years, as Merchant has observed, western mechanistic science and capitalism have viewed the earth as dead and something to be exploitable for profits. Merchant rightly believes that the consequence of viewing the earth this way as opposed to the way of ancient cultures is profound:

The death of nature legitimated its domination. Colonial extractions of resources combined with industrial pollution and depletion have today pushed the whole earth to the brink of ecological destruction.⁴⁰

Another aspect of Gaia that those from Pagan and New Spirituality backgrounds appreciate is the connectedness between all living things, including the earth. Crowley writes, "Connectedness is an important concept in Paganism and is the opposite of the Delusion of Separateness. We are part of Nature's cells in a functioning whole."⁴¹ Christians should similarly affirm a holistic, interconnected, view of life. However, where Christians will differ with those from Pagan and New Spirituality backgrounds, is in the belief that the Earth is divine. However, Christians should not "throw the baby out with the bathwater" because we disagree in this regard. More appropriately, Pagan spirituality should provoke

Christians to relearn from Scripture the high value the Creator has placed on the creation.

2. Toward a Christian Ecological Ethic.

Upon evaluating some of the key spiritual alternatives involved in an ecocentric ethic, we are now in a better position to evaluate the claim that they have a better foundation than Christianity upon which to build an ethic for living on the earth, as well as developing a Christian ecological ethic. To begin with, there is much to be commended in the ethical framework that such spiritual alternatives provide for an ecological ethic. Moreover, the obvious involvement by many holding to such beliefs within the environmental movement is to be applauded.

In seeking to develop a Christian ecological ethic, it must be admitted that Christians have a lot to learn from those who frequently hold to New Spirituality and Pagan spiritual perspectives within the environmental movement.⁴² Differing religious perspectives should not stop us from learning, or perhaps better put, rediscovering, what the Bible has affirmed in regard to many principles held by environmentalists. For example, Loren Wilkinson mentions a,

biblical doctrine that the environmental movement is helping us to rediscover that is, the fact that we are stewards of creation. This picture of the human task as a priestly, preserving, and unfolding activity, in which the Creator's image-bearers are responsible both *for creation* and *to the Creator* is a biblical view.⁴³

However, those holding to a Pagan or New Spirituality ecocentric ethic fall short of providing a solid foundation for a holistic ecological ethic. Even Merchant has admitted,

Ecocentric ethics, like egocentric and homocentric ethics, have a number of philosophical difficulties. Finding a philosophically adequate justification for the intrinsic value of non-human beings has been called by some environmental philosophers the central axiological problem of environmental ethics.⁴⁴

Merchant appears partially defeated when she admits from her worldview, "At the bottom, ecocentric ethics may have a homocentric justification."⁴⁵

The difficulty for Merchant and many others within the environmental movement who hold an ecocentric or other ecological ethic is that they have taken the Creator out of their ethic for the creation, which naturally has everything to do with the Creator. Christianity has the answer to the question Merchant raised: "What intrinsic value do non-human beings, or rocks or trees or the rest of creation have?" Christian sacred Scripture affirms that everything that exists has intrinsic



value because God created all that exists. Hence, the necessary ecological ethic that Merchant has failed to supply is a theocentric ethic.⁴⁶ A theocentric ethic will contain principles coming out of two primary beliefs. First, God is the Creator. Therefore all of creation has the utmost worth and meaning. Second, God has given humanity responsibility to care for the creation. Therefore, we need to carry out God's purposes in this regard. Below we will explore ethical principles derived from the Christian sacred Scripture that follow from these beliefs.

2.1. The earth belongs to God and therefore must be cared for.

On the one hand, the Bible teaches in Psalm 24:1 that "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." On the other hand, Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 teach that human beings have a responsibility to take care of the earth and all creatures.⁴⁷ Christian scholar Elizabeth Achtemeier rightly teaches, "In the Bible there is never any thought that the world and all that is in it belong to human beings."⁴⁸ Rather, we are God's "stewards whose task it is to preserve and care for his earth and to distribute earth's benefits."⁴⁹ God has given humankind the use of the earth and what is in it for specific purposes. Therefore we should not take advantage of God's creation by misusing it in ways that were not originally intended. Christian theologian Clark Pinnock rightly says, "The destruction of nature is hurtful to the God who formed it and loves it. The Spirit suffers along with nature and struggles against powers that despoil."⁵⁰ This is equally so in regard to the earth, as it is to the wider environment such as the ozone layer.

2.2. Humans need to care for all of God's creatures.

Proverbs 12:10 states that "A righteous person cares for the needs of their animal." Exodus 23:12 teaches that animals are not to work any more than six days a week, thus establishing that humans are to care for animals. Ruether writes, "God both works and rests and makes this the pattern for all humans, and even for (domesticated) animals. They too belong to the covenant and are to be given rest on the seventh day."⁵¹ Ruether bases this on "Deuteronomy 5:12-14 [which] includes sons and daughters, male and female slaves and oxen, and donkeys and livestock in the mandate for sabbatical rest from labor; also Exodus 20:10."⁵² The German Christian mystic, Hildegard instructed, "Do not regard other creatures as existing merely to serve your bodily needs. By cherishing them as God requires, your soul will benefit."⁵³ Many well-known Christians have modeled for us a love for all types of creatures. Francis of Assisi called creatures his brothers and sisters.⁵⁴ Similarly, Mitton records that "There are many stories of Celtic saints showing love and concern for animals and birds, and indeed many stories of animals and

birds showing concern for the saints.⁵⁵ Furthermore, God instructed Noah to build an ark and to take two of every creature, a male and a female, which he did in spite of the hard time his neighbors gave him. Calvin DeWitt, director of the *AuSable Institute for Christian Environmental Education* rightly says, "If you translated that story into modern terminology, you would frame it as saving threatened species."⁵⁶

2.3. The future redemption of the earth demonstrates its importance.

The Bible promises that one-day God will restore both humanity and the creation to what they were meant to be.⁵⁷ The renewal of the earth has been a consistent teaching in the Old and New Testaments.⁵⁸ As George Eldon Ladd has written,

The redemption of the natural world from evil and decay is the corollary of the redemption of the body. The prophets constantly described the establishment of God's Kingdom in terms of a redeemed world (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:17-25).⁵⁹

While both Old and New Testaments proclaim the redemption of the world, the New Testament makes explicit that it will take place as the result of Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 8:19-23; Col. 1:20). As Smith writes,

Christ's death and resurrection wiped out evil and death and vindicated creation as good while assuring its renewal and transformation into a new creation. We look to a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet. 3:10-13).⁶⁰

Clifford and Johnson give a helpful application of this doctrine. They write,

God will not let go of this world because he plans its renewal. Therefore we should also connect with our planet and show the care and love of God for it, both in our environmental stewardship and in generally working for a better world. As Jesus taught, the kingdom that is to come is already mirrored in those who join with him now.⁶¹

2.3. The Jubilee principle.

In the book of Leviticus, God instructed Israel to have a seven-year cycle in relationship to the land. During the seventh year several things were to take place. To begin with, Israel was not to sow or gather their crops. They were simply to let the land rest for the year (Lev. 25:2-5; 25:20-22). However, the Israelites, along with all those who are part of their community— including livestock and wild animals— were allowed to eat from the abundant crop God provided in the sixth year. After seven, seven-year cycles, the following year was to be a special Jubilee year where liberty was proclaimed throughout the land to all the



inhabitants. Everyone was to return to their family, and land was to return to the family of origin (Lev. 25:8-12; 25:25-34). Notably, humans were to be restored to freedom and equality within the community if they hadn't been in such a position prior to the Jubilee (Lev. 25:25-55).

The Jubilee year recognized the relationship between the earth, humans, animals, and the rest of creation. It provided a way to bring healing, freedom, and restoration to the whole of God's creation. Ruether rightly understands the importance of the Jubilee laws as lying in their provision of a model of redemptive eco-justice. Furthermore,

Unlike apocalyptic models of redemption, the Jubilee vision does not promise a ðonce-for-allö destruction of evil. Humans will drift into unjust relations between each other, they will overwork animals and exploit land. But this drift is not to be allowed to establish itself as a permanent ðorder.ö Rather, it is to be recognized as a disorder that must be corrected periodically, so that human society regains its right eco-social relationships and starts afresh.⁶²

The Jubilee year provides us with a healthy principle for working towards a healthy relationship between humans, animals, other living creatures, and the earth. It is likely that Jesus had the year of Jubilee in mind when he preached in the synagogue at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4:16-21).⁶³

3. Methods of Change.

As we have seen in our brief survey, the Bible gives us a solid foundation for a well-rounded ecological ethic. However, as some of Christianity's critics have rightly noted, Christians themselves have not done the best job in caring for the earth. How do we best turn the tide from apathy in the church towards creation into a healthy understanding and practical involvement in caring for the environment? We believe non-violent action and reformation are the most appropriate and effective. What follows will list what we believe are the most crucial strategies.

3.1. Non-Violent Action.

The method most often used by activists within the environmental movement is non-violent and sometimes militant direct actions.⁶⁴ Though environmentalists normally practice non-violent action, there is a disappointing increase in militant direct actions. Doyle writes, ðWith increasing frustration at pursuing ðlegitimateö avenues for environmental change, there has been a worldwide increase in more militant, sometimes violent direct actions.ö⁶⁵ Such behavior may risk human harm or even death.

We should be involved in helpful forms of non-violent action where appropriate. However, violent direct actions should never be participated in. Methods of action that involve possible or probable violence towards humans are counterproductive at best, and to be avoided completely.

3.2. Reform in Theology.

In a recent article, John Jefferson Davis examined twenty representative systematic theology texts published by evangelicals since 1970 for the purpose of discovering how much space in chapters on *creation* and the *atonement* was devoted to environmental concerns.⁶⁶ His find is startling. While the theologians surveyed devoted a median of nearly 31% to issues such as evolution, the age of the earth, and the days of Genesis chapter one, they only devoted a median of about 1% to developing the implications of the Biblical doctrine of creation for environmental stewardship.⁶⁷ Davis rightly states,

These results indicate not only the pervasive influence of the scientific enterprise in modern culture, but also the impact of the creation-evolution controversies on the shaping or misshaping of the evangelical theological agenda. It is likewise apparent that evangelical theologians generally do not see any connections between the atoning work of Christ and the future of the earth and Christian responsibility for its proper stewardship.⁶⁸

We probably underestimate the influence that theologians have on the wider body of believers. However, the large amount of debate and discussion surrounding issues such as creation-evolution, the days of Genesis, etc. most likely are directly stimulated by the large amount of space devoted to such issues in standard systematic theology texts. On the other hand, the lack of debate and discussion about environmental concerns in large sectors of the church may well reflect the scant amount of teaching on the subject from theologians.⁶⁹ Theologians need to recognize this and work for change through explicit writing on the environment in appropriate areas of systematic theology texts.

3.3. Reform in Attitudes.

Evangelical Christians in particular have often had an *öusö* and *öthemö* mentality. This has certainly been the case in regard to the environmental movement. A significant minority of evangelicals are indifferent or even hostile toward environmental concerns. What Davis deduces is obvious:

The association of prominent streams of the environmental movement with *öNew Ageö* and eastern religions, liberal Protestant theologies, feminism, and opposition to free-market capitalism has contributed to the ambivalent attitudes toward environmentalism among these conservative evangelicals.⁷⁰



Rather than take an *öusö* and *öthemö* approach, Christians should seek to affirm that which is good in the environmental movement, even when those who affirm it are from religious backgrounds other than Christianity.⁷¹ Affirmation of particular ideas doesn't equal affirmation of a belief system as a whole. A positive approach will also go a long way towards others taking another look at what Christianity has to say about the environment. Roszak has noted positively,

In the mainstream Christian churches today, there are environmental ministries that are encouraging an active discussion of planetary stewardship and creation spirituality; some even seek to undo the longstanding prejudice against *öpaganö* culture and its insights.⁷²

Conclusion

We need to show more concern than we have for the ecological crisis. It is evident that Christianity does have a solid foundation for building an ethic upon which to live upon and care for the earth. However, if Christians don't put the principles which are found in Scripture for an ecological ethic into practice, no one else can be blamed but ourselves if others criticize Christianity for its lack of care and concern for the creation.

Wilkinson's words are sobering, yet offer hope. We will conclude with them. He writes,

The environmental movement is an ethic looking for a religion; indeed, a religion looking for God. We need to recover, from Scripture and the richness of the Christian tradition, deeper doctrines of creation and redemption. Then, as Paul did in Athens, we can say to our contemporaries (who are beginning to catch a glimpse of their stewardly task as God's image-bearers): "What you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23).⁷³

¹ This lecture was delivered December 26, 1966, at the Washington meeting of the American Academy for the Advancement of Science. The text of the lecture was printed in an article in *Science* magazine in 1970. It is also recorded as Appendix I of: Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 70-85.

² For example, Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (New York, New York: Penguin Arkana, 1986), 17, 19. Starhawk (Miriam Simos), *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1997), 5-6.

³ White as quoted in Schaeffer, 78.

⁴ Durning writes, "How much is enough? When does having more cease to add appreciably to human satisfaction? Unless we see that more is not always better, our efforts to forestall ecological decline will be overwhelmed by our appetites." Alan Thein Durning, "Are We Happy Yet?" in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, Edited by Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 69.

⁵ "The nuclear bomb shattered naïve faith in science as a tool for inevitable good, and the growing evidence that technology was perhaps doing irreparable damage to the environment eroded that faith still more. It seemed more and more likely that the tools created by science might result in the destruction of the earth, rather than its decisive establishment on the road to prosperity and happiness for all." Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 36.

⁶ White notes that when the first cannons were fired in the early fourteenth century, it would have impacted the environment with some resulting erosion and deforestation. However, a war fought with hydrogen bombs "might alter the genetics of all life on this planet." White as quoted in Schaeffer, 72. The many other ways in which humankind in general have contributed to the ecological crisis are suspiciously ignored by those who quote White in regard to Christianity's responsibility for the ecological crisis. It also is largely ignored that White described himself as a "churchman." White in Schaeffer, 82. In this regard it should also be noted that White was very positive of the example of St. Francis in relation to creation. So much so that he ended his paper by proposing him as a patron saint for ecologists. See White in Schaeffer, 83-85.

⁷ Loren Wilkinson, "How Christian is the Green Agenda?" in *Christianity Today*, January 11, 1993, 16.

⁸ Loren Wilkinson, "New Age, New Consciousness, and the New Creation" in *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth*, Edited by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), 10.



⁹ White in Schaeffer, 79.

¹⁰ Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (New York, New York: Routledge, 1992), 61.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

¹² *Ibid.*, 63.

¹³ Merchant also speaks of this as an *anthropocentric ethic*. *Ibid.*, 70. This reminds one of the remark of Lynn White Jr. that "Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen." White in Schaeffer, 79. Contrary to Merchant, White means this in a purely derogative way to denote Christianity's focus on humanity. "Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes." White in Schaeffer, 78-79.

¹⁴ Merchant, 62.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

²¹ The spread of Paganism in recent decades appears to be increasing at a steady rate. The modern day revival of Pagan based religions and Wicca in particular roughly coincided with the publication of two books that were published at the same time. The first is Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*. New York, New York: Penguin Arkana, 1986. The second is Starhawk's (Miriam Simos) *The Spiral Dance*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989. In Australia the increasing numbers of Wiccan adherents has been due in part to Wiccans such as Fiona Horne, who have gained a moderate level of celebrity status. See Fiona Horne, *Witch: A Personal Journey*. Milsons Point, NSW: Random House, 1998. It should be noted that we aren't claiming that the growth of Wicca has been caused by such persons and their writings by themselves, but that these were important catalysts.

²² Nevill Drury, "Shamanism and the Sacred Earth" in *Witchcraft*, June/July 2000, 18.

²³ Vivianne Crowley, *Principles of Paganism* (London: Thorsons, 1996), 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

³⁰ *Gaia* is the word for the Greek Goddess of the Earth.

³¹ James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

³² One might think that support of Gaia within a religious framework, comes from only New Age or Pagan based thought systems, but this is not the case. For example Rosemary Radford Ruether, who is a feminist Christian theologian, appears to affirm basic Gaia theory in her book *Gaia & God* when she writes, "In this book I assume the earth forms a living system, of which humans are an inextricable part." Ruether, 5.

³³ Loren Wilkinson, "Gaia Spirituality: A Christian Critique" in *Themelios*, April 1993, Vol. 18, No. 3, 4.

³⁴ Tod Connor, "Is the Earth Alive?" in *Christianity Today*, January 11, 1993, 25.

³⁵ James Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 15. Lovelock goes so far as to state that when Lynn Margulis and he introduced the Gaia hypothesis in the 1970s, that certain aspects of it were wrong. *Ibid.*, 19. He also appears to be overly conscious at the criticisms of fellow scientists, especially in regard to the main aspect of the Gaia hypothesis that New Age followers and others have grabbed a hold of "that the Earth is alive. He writes, "In science, a hypothesis is really no more than a "let's suppose." The first Gaia book was hypothetical and lightly written—a rough pencil sketch that tried to catch a view of the Earth seen from a different perspective. Thoughtful criticisms of this first book led me to new and deeper insights into Gaia. The notion that the Earth is alive, so offensive to biologists, I now recognize as true only in a physiological sense." *Ibid.*, 11.



³⁶ Ibid., 15.

³⁷ Ibid., 19.

³⁸ In fact, not even Lovelock and Margulis agree on some basic aspects of the hypothesis. For example, Margulis is not even in agreement with Lovelock on viewing Gaia as a living organism. Ernest Lucas, *Science and The New Age Challenge* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1996), 127-128.

³⁹ Merchant, 41.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁴¹ Crowley, 18. Similarly, McLaughlin and Davidson write, "Understanding the interconnectedness of life" a truth long held by the Ageless Wisdom "is one of the first doors that opens onto the inner workings of world events." Corinne McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson, *Spiritual Politics: Changing the World from the Inside Out* (New York: Ballantine, 1994), 22.

⁴² However, Geisler's critique of the pantheistic view of ecology is appropriate. Though he affirms there are "many desirable aspects of a pantheistic view of the environment," he rightly states "The heart of the problem with the pantheistic view of the environment lies not so much in what it recommends doing about the environment, but rather why it recommends it. Nature should be respected, but not because it is divine." Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1990), 300.

⁴³ Loren Wilkinson, "The Uneasy Conscience of the Human Race: Rediscovering Creation in the 'Environmental' Movement" in *God & Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F. H. Henry*, edited by D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), 318.

⁴⁴ Merchant, 78.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Fox argues against those who would claim to hold a theocentric ethic by saying that it has still been humans who have "by divine decree" had dominion over all the earth. He also states that "from a nonanthropocentric perspective, personalistic kinds of theocentrism, such as the dominant form of Christianity where humans are made in the image of a god to whom they have a privileged personal relationship, are

in any case simply anthropocentric *projections* upon the cosmos.ö Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 9. Fox's argument appears to be based more upon acceptance of Feuerbach's (1804-1872) simplistic belief that religion is wish-fulfillment or the projection of idealized human nature onto a God created in their own image. The answer to Fox and Feuerbach is the same: If a person's car breaks down and they wish for a mechanic, it doesn't necessarily mean that such a person as a mechanic doesn't exist. Similarly, if humans wish for a God who has given humanity responsibility for stewardship over the creation, it doesn't necessarily mean that this is not the way things are.

⁴⁷ Those who interpret these passages as meaning that humans can destroy or abuse what God has created at will are mistaken. öMoreover, as biblical scholars have been quick to reply, human authority over nature remains always delegated authority. Nature is not private property to be done with as one wishes, but stewardship over an earth that remains ultimately God's. To abuse this trust in destructive relations to nature is to bring divine wrath upon one's head. God, not ömen,ö is in control of nature. Neither nature's blessings nor nature's destructive power is handed over into autonomous human hands.ö Ruether, 210.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nature, God & Pulpit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992), 63.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 77.

⁵¹ Ruether, 20.

⁵² Ibid., 276, n. 7. The Noahic covenant is also made with nonhuman creation in mind (Genesis 9:9-17).

⁵³ Robert Van de Weyer (Editor), *Hildegard in a Nutshell* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), 41.

⁵⁴ Ian Bradley, *God is Green: Ecology for Christians* (New York, New York: Doubleday, 1990), 97.

⁵⁵ Michael Mitton, *Restoring the Woven Cord: Strands of Celtic Christianity for the Church Today* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995), 56-57.

⁵⁶ Calvin DeWitt as quoted in: Alan AtKisson, öThou Shalt Care for the Earth: Conservative Christians begin to See Greenö in *Areopagus*,



Volume 8, No. 3, 1995, 7. According to Erickson, "The elimination of any one of these kinds is consequently a loss that causes God regret and grief. On a continuing basis, numerous species are becoming extinct. It may seem a small matter to us when one of several similar or obscure species, such as the snail darter, passes out of existence. Yet in God's sight the creation has, at least to some degree, become poorer." Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Mind & Heart: Perspectives on Theological and Practical Issues* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1993), 54.

⁵⁷ Wilkinson rightly says that "we have focused on only part of the biblical doctrine of redemption and have left out God's concern for the renewal of all creation." Wilkinson, "The Uneasy Conscience of the Human Race: Rediscovering Creation in the 'Environmental' Movement", 314. Similarly Granberg-Michaelson writes, "Christians have always found it easy to believe that God will save them, but they find it more difficult to believe that God's intention is to save and restore the whole creation. Yet this is the constant declaration of the Word of God. God's redemption reaches out to his creation." Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), 4.

⁵⁸ In response to the environmentalist critique that Christianity regards the world as cursed and of little worth, Wilkinson presents the biblical view. He writes, "A far more biblical view is that creation is fallen *through* human sin and will be redeemed *through* human redemption." Wilkinson, "The Uneasy Conscience of the Human Race: Rediscovering Creation in the 'Environmental' Movement", 317.

⁵⁹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1974), 567.

⁶⁰ Ebbie C. Smith, "Environlove: The Christian Approach to Ecology" in *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, Vol. 37, No. 2, Spring 1995, 27.

⁶¹ Clifford and Johnson, 109-110.

⁶² Ruether, 213.

⁶³ Yoder sees the Jubilee as having implications for the believer today as well. He helpfully provides application of Jubilee principles according to Jesus' teaching. See especially John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: vicit Agnus noster* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), 60-71.

⁶⁴ Some non-violent actions include marches, rallies, pickets, strikes, and blockades. An example of a militant direct action is spiking. Terminology is taken from Doyle. Timothy Doyle, *Green Power: The Environmental Movement in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2000), 48-49.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁶ John Jefferson Davis, "Evangelical Blind Spots in the Structure and Content of Recent Evangelical Systematic Theologies" in *Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society*, Volume 43, No. 2, June 2000.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 284-285.

⁶⁹ Hughes study regarding environmental concern and Christian beliefs suggests this. Hughes writes, "This study shows that Christian beliefs do play a part in people's thinking, and thus the input of religious leaders and thinkers may well have significant impacts." Philip J. Hughes, "Values and Religion: A Case Study of Environmental Concern and Christian Beliefs and Practices among Australians" in *Christian Research Association Research Paper No. 3*, August 1997 (Victoria, Australia: Christian Research Association), 24.

⁷⁰ Davis, 274. Similarly, Wilkinson writes that many Christians "withdraw from environmentalism as an infectious carrier of New Age ideas." Wilkinson, "How Christian is the Green Agenda?" 16.

⁷¹ Many Christians have been slow to affirm even the very large interest in Celtic Christianity. According to Bradley, "In the early stages of the current revival, the 'Celtic fan club' was largely confined to Christians of a liberal disposition. Charismatics were the first from outside this circle to break clear of evangelical suspicions about the New Age and pantheistic aspects of Celtic Christianity and to recognise its orthodoxy and biblical basis." Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 205.

⁷² Theodore Roszak, "Where Psyche Meets Gaia" in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, Edited by Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 7.

⁷³ Wilkinson, "The Uneasy Conscience of the Human Race: Rediscovering Creation in the 'Environmental' Movement" 320.