

Drilling in the Cathedral¹

By Larry Rasmussen

Abstract: Utilitarianism, alienation, consumerism, and oppression are major forces endangering Earth's well-being. Over and against these morally and ecologically destructive forces are practices and ideas rooted and nourished in both ancient and modern religio-moral institutions and traditions. As powerful voices of faith calling the present to account, sacramentalism, mysticism, asceticism, and prophetic liberative practices offer Earth-honoring ways of life that draw from shared wells and deep-running waters.

Key Terms: sacramentalism, utilitarianism, ecology, mysticism, creation, consumerism

"How can Christianity call itself catholic, if the universe itself is left out?"²

--Simone Weil

Consider two vignettes. On February 15, 2003, more than a hundred cities hosted "apparently the largest coordinated one-day popular protest in the history of the world."³ The prospective U.S.-led war with Iraq precipitated this ample coalition of the unwilling. Millions marched, on every continent, including Antarctica!⁴

Digital technologies made the nimble organizing possible. Fluid combinations of social networks and communications dissolved barriers of time and place and mobilized international civil society. Sociologists even spoke of emerging "heterarchies" displacing "hierarchies."

The creative power of such instant community remains to be seen, not to mention its staying power. Transborder community could set as quickly as it rose. But what *was* seen everywhere in those pulsing ranks was a certain icon. A marbled planet, captured by Kodak in a God's eye view from space, appeared on placard after placard. It will not fade in coming years.

Few marchers would have known the Russian Orthodox proverb: "Earth is the icon that hangs around God's neck." Many sensed just such status, however. Each placard had room for but a few words, arched over bent horizons of sea, land and sky: No War on

Iraq; No War on the World; Not in Our Name. Otherwise the message was the fragile planet itself, still beautiful "beyond the singing of it"^{5,6} but endangered by a species that, without wincing, thinks itself the trustee.

That image was first transmitted by astronauts Frank Borman, William Anders and James Lovell in 1968. Dostoevsky, picturing Alyosha's rapture in the monastery yard, may have voiced their experience even better than they: "The fresh, motionless, still night enfolded the earth... The silence of the earth seemed to merge with the silence of the heavens, the mystery of the earth came in contact with the mystery of the stars."⁷ The astronauts chose their own words, however, and on Christmas Eve, as the distant jewel disappeared below moon's horizon in a quiet earthset, they read from an ancient account: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth..." Simple cosmic poetry.

Millions marching across the planet, worrying over war and God's icon, is the first vignette. The second is less dramatic, but not less important—the Bush Administration's energy policy and the fate of its centerpiece, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Thomas Friedman, feeling compelled to swerve from his regular column on "Foreign Affairs" to join a domestic debate about drilling in this wilderness, put aside the economic calculations that usually preoccupy policy works in Washington. "I'll let the experts point out the irresponsibility built into the Bush budget," he writes, and

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moves on to another kind of argument altogether. He finds it in Richard Feinberg's concept of wilderness. Wilderness is "immutable," Feinberg writes, "it is like perfection; there are no degrees to it. Oil development in a wilderness, no matter how sensitive, changes the very nature of it. It means it's no longer wilderness. If the drill worshipers prevail in the Arctic Refuge, then there will be no place on this continent where a unique environment will be safe from greed and short-term interests."⁸

Friedman's ensuing analogy focuses on worshipers as well, albeit not "drill worshipers." Countering President Bush's argument that drilling can take place without harming the wilderness, Friedman says: "[That's] like saying you can do online trading in church on your Palm Pilot without disturbing anyone. It violates the very ethic of the place."⁹

"The very ethic of the place." Why is drilling in this "unique environmental cathedral"¹⁰ a moral violation, if indeed it is? For that matter, is it truly wrong to trade online in church if it bothers no one at prayer, interrupts no one receiving the sacrament, and doesn't distract the organist?

Assume for the moment that Friedman, whether finally right or wrong about drilling, has intuited something of moral gravity when he is repulsed by heavy equipment in the cathedral (or, like Jesus, repulsed by heavy trading). Moral emotions, not least moral-aesthetic ones, ought not be dismissed as untutored. They register our initial judgments, if not our final ones, and reveal as much about our nature, our values, even our sense of godliness, as pious emotions do. Add the worries of the global marchers, and the gravity of Friedman's intuition is accentuated. Violate "the very ethic of the place?" Not in Our Name.

The vignettes do not *explain* moral emotion and gravity, however. Nor do they determine policy. Numerous stands are possible on the agonizing particulars of war-making, peace-making, energy and security, even after the horror of war and the violation of drilling in the cathedral have been registered with every ounce of our being.

Not that spirited arguments over data, history, and strategy are the only real differences. Moral emotions themselves differ. They vary in substance and sit differently in the gut. Nonetheless, they are always in play from

the outset, and they always matter. As first response, they usually locate the burden of proof for any given issue. Moral emotions are thus a critical initial element of practical moral reasoning itself.

Still, moral-aesthetic sensibilities rarely, of themselves, wholly determine where our basic loyalties finally thump down. Whether the environment has sacramental status for us, or whether we consider earth as truly home, shapes our response mightily, of course. But even if all who share similar emotions press their noses to the same pane to gaze at the same scene, they may well respond in different ways. No single moral sources and no unbroken lines run from norms and dispositions in ethics to decisions, strategies and tactics.

Nonetheless, assessment there must be, with actions taken. Toward that end what follows here offers a way of thinking *with* certain categories, as aids to thinking *about* compelling earth issues. It can be dubbed a "religious ecology," if that both signals how religious systems, including their moral-aesthetic sensibilities, work, and how religions view nature and are influenced by it. Specifically, the question is whether traditions hoary with age and spanning race, place, clan, and cultures speak to soul, mind and body in ways that aid an earth ethic. Do deep-running traditions offer ways of leaning into life that assist (not determine) practical moral reasoning on vexing issues of earth community?

We proceed, then, on the assumption that Friedman, the astronauts, and the coalitions in the streets have in effect issued an invitation. Or posed a question. Do tenured religio-moral intuitions and traditions, as well as newly-written icons, say something compelling to planet-saving issues?

For now we will name these deep traditions and their emotions: sacramentalism, mysticism, asceticism, and prophetic-liberative practices. As the "ideal types" of a working typology they are less nuanced—and less sullied—than the history from which they are drawn. Yet their very distillation, even when forced in the way ideal types are, exposes their logic and lets us examine their power.

Over against this typology is another. This time, however, ideal types describe the major forces affecting earth's well-being. I will call these forces utilitarianism, alienation, consumerism, and oppression.

What happens if we read these traditions *vis-a-vis* these forces? Might religious faith in its recurring forms thereby

speaking truth to the powers we ourselves wield? Are ways of life disclosed that aid “the great work”¹¹ before us—the epochal task of learning to live in mutually enhancing relationships with one another and the rest of the Community of Life? And might alliances be forged *across* religions to earth-honoring ends? Mystics, after all, understand mystics, monks understand monks,¹² and those struggling for justice sing one another’s songs. That these millennial Christian traditions have their counterparts in most religions is of more than passing importance.

1. Sacramentalism and Utilitarianism

“Saving Souls and Salmon” ran as a short feature in the Sunday *New York Times*. What might this unlikely conjunction—salmon and souls—mean? Archbishop Alex Brunett led *Times* writer Jim Robbins to the baptismal font of St. James Cathedral in downtown Seattle. “The water isn’t just sitting there,” he said, pointing to its gentle movement. “We don’t baptize people in stagnant water, but flowing water, water that is alive.”¹³ The waters of life (baptism) and the waters of life (in this case, the Columbia River and salmon) was the connection. For the Archbishop, the connection was sacramental. Saving souls and saving salmon belong to the same universe.

“The Columbia River Watershed: Realities and Possibilities” is a bioregional pastoral letter of Roman Catholic bishops in Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia. Unbridled logging, mining, grazing and dam building have, over a century, left the great river and its basin in dire straits, if its emblem—the salmon—is any measure. The annual run of an estimated 16,000,000 salmon has dwindled to about 700,000.¹⁴

Perhaps no less arresting is the name the bishops have given the endangered watershed: a “sacramental commons.” “We’re trying to establish a sacredness in the world around us,” the Archbishop explained to Robbins. Establishing such sacredness assumes the lead tenet of all sacramentalism—material reality bears a value humans share and name but do not bestow. Don Sampson, a Yakima Indian leader, chuckled in response to the Columbia declared a sacramental commons. “Maybe God has spoken to [the bishops],” he said. “I hope the pope gets on board.” He added, in a more serious tone, “The

church is being up front and dispelling the myth of Manifest Destiny and dominion over the Earth. That’s refreshing and welcome.”¹⁵

Sacramentalism hasn’t always been poised over against dominion. The Great Chain of Being, arguably the most influential of all Christian cosmologies, bundled sacrament and dominion together and sent them sailing the high seas to colonize the New World. Pope Alexander VI’s famous “Bull of Donation” simply gave—donated—all islands and mainlands “discovered and to be discovered, one hundred leagues to the West and South of the Azores toward India,”¹⁶ and not already occupied or held by any Christian king or prince as of Christmas 1492, to Isabel and Ferdinand of Spain. The pope was utterly clear: European Christian monarchs should rule the world, spread civilization, and save the benighted souls of non-Christian brothers and sisters. This was “taking” on a grand scale, in the guise of giving.

In keeping with most sacramentalist cosmologies, the Great Chain pictured life as an outflowing of the divine in an endless array of diverse and interdependent life. For sacramentalism the universe is alive, the universe is manifold, the universe is whole.

The particular ordering of this life as a great chain inscribed dominion, however. Humans rest a bit lower than angels, with God above and all else beneath. Within this special species, “crowned with glory and honor,” (Ps. 8) men’s standing is forever a notch above women’s, while (higher) reason, mind, and spirit rule (lesser) emotion and body. Most strikingly, as already noted, empire under the auspices of advanced sectors is sanctioned as conquest and colonization, commerce and the spread of Christianity. This was the quartet that followed in the wake of Columbus in the Age of Discovery. In such a scheme, the Great Chain’s sacramentalism served a “civilizing mission” in which “inferior” peoples and cultures (non-European) were the beneficiaries of a salvific gospel and way of life.

Superiority of such a racist and cultural cast was brutal. Native peoples were killed, moved out or assimilated, all on European terms. Slaves suffered the Middle Passage, with great loss of life and centuries of ensuing threat and fear. The underlying morality for all this was both chilling and theological. “Again and again during the centuries of European imperialism,” writes environmental historian Alfred Crosby, “the Christian view

that all men are brothers was to lead to persecution of non-Europeans—he who is my brother sins to the extent that he is unlike me.”¹⁷

Religious cosmologies always run an inventory of the universe, bind its elements together, and establish sin, vice, reward and virtue on the basis of the outcome (“all men are brothers...he who is my brother sins to the extent that...”). This particular sacramentalist cosmology did so in ways that ascribed value to life forms and states as “higher” and “lower.” Its racism and androcentrism have persisted a very long time, even in their crassest forms. As late as 1957, William F. Buckley Jr., guru of conservative Republican thought and editor of the highly influential *National Review*, responded in this way to the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision on *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The central question that emerges—and it is not a parliamentary question or a question that is answered by merely consulting a catalogue of rights of American citizens, born equal—is whether the White community in the South is entitled to take such measures as are necessary to prevail, politically and culturally, in areas where it does not predominate numerically? The sobering answer is Yes—the White community is so entitled because, for the time being, it is the advanced race....*National Review* believes that the South’s premises are correct. If the majority wills what is socially atavistic, then to thwart the majority may be, though undemocratic, enlightened....Universal suffrage is not the beginning of wisdom or the beginning of freedom.¹⁸

Yet the bishops of the northwest U.S. and southwest Canada are correct that an alternative also rests in sacramentalism. This comes clear in another pastoral letter, now from the U.S. Catholic Conference, i.e., U.S. bishops as a whole. “Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action in Light of Catholic Social Teaching” shifts the reigning metaphor from a ranked ladder to “the web of life [as] one.” Assuming this life web, the bishops “explore the links between concern for the person and for the earth, between natural ecology and social ecology.”¹⁹ The environmental crisis is “a moral challenge,” they argue. It “calls us to examine how we use and share the goods of the earth, what we pass

on to future generations and how we live in harmony with God’s creation.”²⁰ Like all sacramentalists, including “Great Chainers,” the bishops view creation as a “commons” with intrinsic linkages “between natural ecology and social ecology.” In this tradition of moral theology the earth’s goods have a universal destination in accord with “the common good” or “the common welfare.” So, for example, if capitalist markets and the right to private property aid in the universal destination of the goods of the earth as the commons we belong to and share, they have vital roles to play. If, however, capitalist markets and privatized property effectively close the commons and remove goods from just distribution to those who need them, they fail as legitimate means for achieving and sustaining a just society.

The present environmental crisis as moral challenge is sufficiently daunting, the bishops continue, that conversion—turning in another direction—is required. It is a conversion to earth and to God in the same moment and together. “We need a change of heart to preserve and protect the planet for our children and for generations yet unborn.”²¹

But where is the power to change hearts? “In the sacramental universe itself,” the bishops answer. Nature bears God’s presence. “Throughout history people have continued to meet the Creator on mountaintops, in vast deserts, and alongside waterfalls and gently flowing springs. In storms and earthquakes, they found expressions of divine power. In the cycle of the seasons and the courses of the stars, they have discerned signs of God’s fidelity and wisdom. We still share, though dimly, in that sense of God’s presence in nature.”²²

Earth is a sacrament here—a disclosure of God’s presence by visible and tangible signs, like the waters of baptism and the waters of the Columbia River and its salmon. Transcendent power is imminent, as close as the grain and the grape, the oil, water and wine of the liturgy, or the fields, forests and waterways around us. Those who reverence God’s presence in creation and understand themselves as part and parcel of the world as sacrament will be moved to care for creation as “the sacred trust” it is, the bishops contend.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew also drew on sacramentalism at a 1997 “Symposium on the Sacredness of the Environment.” “The Lord suffuses all of creation with His Divine presence in one continuous legato from the substance of atoms to the Mind of

God,” he said in closing. “Let us renew the harmony between heaven and earth, and transfigure every detail, every particle of life.”²³

Perhaps little more need be said about this theme of creation as “one continuous legato from the substance of atoms to the Mind of God.” Unless it be to underscore creation’s exuberance. “Extravagance! Nature will try anything once,”²⁴ writes Annie Dillard. Or unless it be to underline sacramentalism’s emphatic note that this extravagant life is a freely-offered *gift of God* and the *medium of grace*, a gift ritually borne into the worshipful presence of God and renewed there in contemplative and liturgical practices.

In this tradition the drama of the liturgy is the ritual enactment of cosmic community, nothing less than the drama of all creation’s redemption. Not surprisingly, the Eucharist itself is central, since creation’s redemption is caught up in the Passion of Jesus and the church’s liturgical portrayal of it. But the moral ethos of this way of being in the world is also signaled in the word itself. *Eucharistia* is Greek for “thanksgiving” and a word implying liturgy and ritual as the form of people’s grateful response and as a guide for their living. If the bread of heaven is shared freely and equally with all as God’s own way, and if all are welcome, without qualification, to this welcome table, why do we not do likewise for the other tables of the world?

More on Sacramentalism and Utilitarianism

The possibilities of web-of-life sacramentalism as counterpoint to dominion ethics don’t rest only in locating its great themes or describing its ethos, however. Those possibilities begin elsewhere, with notice that sacramentalism is almost the antithesis of the working cosmology and theology of the institutions and practices that created the modern world. Modern institutions and practices feed on a plastic view of nature. Nature means “natural resources” and “capital,” now extended to “human resources” and “capital,” even “moral” and “spiritual” “resources and capital.” These betray a market mindset that is utilitarian with a vengeance and devoid of sacramental sensibilities. They belong to Max Weber’s “disenchanted” world.²⁵ The numinous is bled from the common, the holy is leached

from the ordinary, the mystical is cut away from the everyday. Use, utility, and possession measure all value, and these are relative to human appropriation and significance. The (human) subject determines the worth of all else, as object.

This subject/object relationship is, to be sure, a *primary* relationship. It is a primary “word,” in Buber’s sense. It is thus constitutive of our very being as well as the status of the other element in the relationship. But use relationship is “I-It” only, and not “I-Thou.”²⁶ The human being it thus creates is a subject arrayed over against all else as objects, albeit objects-in-relationship (to the subject).

Even pathfinding environmentalists occasionally adopt such a stance. Gifford Pinchot, an influential preservationist/conservationist who served as mentor to Teddy Roosevelt in the establishment of the national parks system, argued that in the end only two realities inhabit the planet—“people” and “resources.” The latter are to be preserved for the sake of the former.

How deeply utilitarianism runs as dominion ethics is captured in a full-page advertisement appearing the day the Hall of Biodiversity opened at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.²⁷ An eye-catching selection of flora and fauna from around the world covers the page. Across the top in large letters is the sentence: “We believe in equal opportunity regardless of race, creed, gender, kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, or species.” Creatures then tumble down the page, followed by smaller-lettered text: “All life is interconnected. So without a supporting cast of millions of species, human survival is far from guaranteed. This variety and interdependence of species is what’s called biodiversity. And it matters to Monsanto in particular. Our business depends on making discoveries in the world of genetic information. Information that is lost forever when a species becomes extinct. Information that offers solutions in agriculture, nutrition, and medicine never before thought possible. For a population that’s growing. On a planet that’s not.” The logo—a growing plant—then appears next to the name and trademark: Monsanto: Food Health Hope. The last line is: “Monsanto is honored to be a sponsor of the Hall of Biodiversity at the American Museum of Natural History. www.monsanto.com.”

This ad is unthinkable apart from ecology and its impact. Its thought-world appears to be holistic “web”

thinking, based in good science. The awareness of complex, living interdependence seems central, though it is not quite so. At the outset the ad even strikes a notion of sacramentalism and bio-democracy worthy of St. Francis. But by the bottom of the page we are keeping company with the utilitarian promise-and-fulfillment theology of so much biotechnology: “Monsanto: Food Health Hope” and “solutions in agriculture, nutrition, and medicine never before thought possible.” We are also keeping company with utilitarian subjectivism in ethics, even if it has been eco-sensitized. That is, this moral universe not only assumes that human beings are the sole moral agents, it assumes that the only actions that finally matter are those affecting human beings. Humans will, in turn, be the sole judges of those actions, without reference to any court of appeal beyond the human subject. And by the very bottom, far right hand corner of the page, we have placed good science and a viable way of life firmly in the hands of global business. Long-standing boundaries of mind and matter, human culture and resistant nature, and sharp distinctions of humans from other creatures, have been erased, it would seem, in favor of “equal opportunity regardless of race...phylum...class...genus, or species” in a world where “[a]ll life is interconnected.”

Descartes and Bacon, it would seem, have passed on to their reward. Yet the erasure of these boundaries is only apparent. Practice itself features human mind and culture as the creators, controllers, and high-tech bio-cowboys working ecosystems as they would their ranchlands. These creatures are generic, not particular. They are not even truly creatures, as biological individuals. They are, categorically and simply, “information” and “resources” that in due course will find their end-use way as commodities in the market place. Humans are thereby re-centered as masters without qualification. The disconnect of humans from their co-siblings in creation thus remains unattended and unmended, as do other elements of utilitarian domination as a morality. This is not Earth Community, copiously peopled by “all things bright and beautiful,” “all creatures great and small,” and “all things wise and wonderful” (to remember a hymn). This is Genetic Mine, commercial modernity in ecological mode. So in one striking page, what begins as a confession of bio-democracy and a world congruent with sacramentalism ends as indispensable user-friendly exploitation that promises, yet one more

time, to do good by doing well, for profit and without (human) sacrifice. Nature is there for us, period, full stop. From kingdom to kingdom, phylum to phylum, species to species, gene to gene, atom to atom, and sea to shining sea.

Whatever moral sensibilities and emotions are on display here, and whatever ethic reigns in these quarters, they are not those of sacramental imagination. Life is not a gift in the Monsanto world but a commodity. Profound gratitude is not the wellspring of ethics; possession and utility are. The penultimate page of Annie Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* captures the contrasting moral-aesthetic emotion nicely: “I think the dying pray at the last not ‘please,’ but ‘thank you,’ as a guest thanks his host at the door.”²⁸

The subject/object relationship assumed in the winsome, if misleading, Monsanto advertisement leads to the next typological set.

2. Mysticism and Alienation

On another pilgrim day at Tinker Creek, Dillard found herself all of a sudden face-to-face with a weasel. “Our eyes locked and someone threw away the key. Our look was as if two lovers, or deadly enemies, met unexpectedly on an overgrown path when each had been thinking of something else.”²⁹

Not all mystical experience is so abrupt. Or so uncertain whether the locked eyes are those of enemies or lovers. But the mystical *is* always a certain *kind of meeting* and a certain way of *being*. It is subject joined to subject or, in some experiences, the dissolution of subjectivity itself in profound union. In this meeting and union, *direct* experience prevails. Friedrich von Huelgel’s account, offered by Dorothee Soelle in *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, distinguishes three enduring elements present in all religion. The historical-institutional addresses itself to mind and memory. In Christianity this is the “Petrine.” The analytical-speculative aligns itself with reason and doctrine. This is the “Pauline.” But there is also an intuitive-emotional element that directs itself to the will and to love. This is the specifically mystical, identified as the “Johannine.”³⁰ Like the eagle that symbolizes the Fourth Gospel, the soul has a capacity to look directly into the sun and to soar.³¹ The testimony of mystics is that any

and all can soar in this manner. All are able to “move beyond the confines of society and history [and] break the bounds of normal human interaction, normal consciousness, and normal physical reality,”³² in order to draw upon a wisdom hidden deep within this world or resident beyond it. For mystics, like ascetics, this is release from the grip of the social ego and socially constructed senses of the body itself. This is direct experience of the divine beyond the stipulations of doctrine and institution. This is truth apprehended apart from the authority of society’s keepers of the truth. And this is revelation shorn from common attachments and desires. Here the way things seem to be is not the way they truly are or might be. Institutions and their powers are not *givens*. They are not fates we must accommodate. They are habitual patterns that could be otherwise.

In short, mystics testify to a profound submersion into “the All” that moves across their lives like the ripples from a pebble tossed into a pond. This is the oceanic experience in which we “touch with our living hearts the Heart of the World and listen to the secret revelations of its unending beat.”³³ And we do so—this is the point—in unmediated fashion.

One consequence of transcending the hold that forces around us have upon us—a part of this oceanic feeling and its ripples—is strong moral agency. Such capacity to discern, decide and act may on the face of it seem virtually autonomous, since mystics are notoriously beholden to no one in sight. But such moral strength and independence is the spillover of the profound consent to, and union with, the All, a consent and union in which, paradoxically, self itself falls away, the heresy of “mine” and “thine” falls away as well, and the mystic’s quest ends in the cool cosmic fire some name “God” and others refuse to name at all.

When the return is made to intransigent worldly reality, as it must be made, the seemingly “autonomous” agency does not dissipate. Rather, the participant in the mystical experience is now so affected by cosmic beauty and harmony that she or he is permanently dissatisfied with the world around. That world may indeed be fully embraced, in utter compassion. But things will not be right until Eden is reborn and its energies sing with the stars. Mystics cannot deny the wondrous burden of beauty and truth that the moment in God brings.

Soelle reports that, again and again, this direct experience of transcendence leads to lives of nonviolence,

ego-lessness and possession-lessness. Those who experience the unity of all things awakened from the prison in which they have fallen asleep³⁴ to take up justice as a personal virtue and way of being. “The flood of fire abated,” Annie Dillard writes of her own mystical encounter, “but I’m still spending the power.”³⁵

Janet Ruffing’s collaborative study comes to a similar conclusion. After investigating Jewish, Muslim, and Christian mysticism in various contexts and cultures, Ruffin goes on to say that “beyond these traditions, every tradition of mystical revelation—Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, and others—points to an alternative *form of culture* and *intends* an alternative way for human beings to dwell together.”³⁶

The 20th c. Catholic mystic Simone Weil illustrates, in her own idiosyncratic way, everything said to this point. *Two Moral Essays* was written as part of her work for the De Gaulle government in exile when Germany occupied France in the 1940s. The work includes a “Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations” as well as thoughts on “Human Personality.” The former begins with as succinct a statement of mysticism as any, albeit offered in the prose of Weil the instructor rather than the poetry of Weil the mystic. That it comes as the lead-in for “a statement of human obligations” only confirms Soelle’s and Ruffing’s conclusions. Weil’s opening pages follow. They ground the moral obligation developed in later pages.

There is a reality outside the world, that is to say, outside space and time, outside man’s mental universe, outside any sphere whatsoever that is accessible to human faculties.

Corresponding to this reality, at the center of the human heart, is the longing for an absolute good, a longing which is always there and is never appeased by any object in this world. Another terrestrial manifestation of this reality lies in the absurd and insoluble contradictions which are always the terminus of human thought when it moves exclusively in this world.

Just as the reality of this world is the sole foundation of facts, so that other reality is the sole foundation of good.

That reality is the unique source of all the good that can exist in this world: that is to say, all beauty, all truth, all justice, all legitimacy, all

order, and all human behaviour that is mindful of obligations.

Those minds whose attention and love are turned towards that reality are the sole intermediary through which good can descend from there and come among men.

Although it is beyond the reach of any human faculties, man has the power of turning his attention and love towards it.

Nothing can ever justify the assumption that any man, whoever he may be, has been deprived of this power.

It is a power which is only real in this world in so far as it is exercised. The sole condition for exercising it is consent.

To anyone who does actually consent to directing his attention and love beyond the world, towards the reality that exists outside the reach of all human faculties, it is given to succeed in doing so. In that case, sooner or later, there descends upon him a part of the good, which shines through him upon all that surrounds him.

The combination of these two facts—the longing in the depth of the heart for absolute good, and the power, though only latent, of directing attention and love to a reality beyond the world and of receiving good from it—constitutes a link which attaches every man without exception to that other reality.

Whoever recognizes that reality recognizes also that link. Because of it, he holds every human being without any exception as something sacred to which he is bound to show respect.³⁷

Weil goes on to argue that every-human-being-as-sacred is not a deduction that can be reasoned from the world as we know it. The world we know is one of “unequal objects unequally solicit[ing] our attention.”³⁸ Some people grab our attention, others remain unidentified and unknown, still others belong only to a collective identity that erases their individuality. Factual world knowledge alone, as the springboard of action, leads, Weil says, to *inequality* of both respect and treatment. From a strictly empirical point of view, “men are unequal in all their relations with the things of this world, without exception.”³⁹

The point of her essay, however, is “the presence of a link with the reality outside the world” that is identical for all human beings and that has consequences for how

all persons are to be understood and treated. All humans have their center “in an unquenchable desire for good” that resides on the other side of that thin place separating the factual world from the world mystical experience imbibes. By attention to that other reality, we arrive at a center that belongs to all equally.⁴⁰ This center funds a dignity and respect that also belongs to all equally. Weil does not hesitate to name it the “sacred” that we all *are*.

This innate desire for the good and the knowledge of our own being as sacred can erode, be beaten from us, or be betrayed. While it is genetic, it is also vulnerable. Weil’s response is strong moral obligation to repair the world. “When a man’s life is destroyed or damaged by some wound or privation of soul or body, which is due to other men’s actions or negligence, it is not only his sensibility that suffers but also his aspiration towards the good. Therefore there has been sacrilege towards that which is sacred in him.”⁴¹ To fail through neglect or commission to engage and draw out the sacred that others *are*, is desecration itself. It is a violation of creation and an offense against God. Such stark moral-theological reasoning stands behind Weil’s argument elsewhere that the only proper love of neighbor is justice, not (subject to object) charity. Justice is repair of the world that rests in mysticism’s knowledge of radical equality and shared subjectivity (all have the same center, all merit the respect due the sacred).⁴²

If moral agency, rooted in profound union with being and consent to it as a communion of sacred subjects, isn’t left behind in the mystical experience Weil describes, neither is nature. On the contrary, teeming nature abounds in much mystical consciousness and holds uncommonly high rank in mystical visions. Consider Hildegard’s encounter with the divine:

I, the highest and fiery power, have kindled every living spark...I am...the fiery life of the divine essence—I am aflame above the beauty of the fields; I shine in the waters; in the sun, the moon and the stars, I burn. And by the means of the airy wind, I stir everything into quickness with a certain invisible life which sustains all.⁴³

Or consider Weil’s sentence at the outset of this essay, “How can Christianity call itself catholic if the universe itself is left out?”⁴⁴ From an essay on “Forms of

the Implicit Love of God,” this sentence is in the section on “Love of the Order of the World.” “Love of the Order of the World” is itself largely a gloss on the beauty of the world and on love of matter as the proper parallel to love of (the human) neighbor. “In the beauty of the world,” she writes, “brute necessity becomes an object of love. What is more beautiful than the action of gravity on the fugitive folds of the sea waves, or on the almost eternal folds of the mountains?”⁴⁵ Not less than Christ is present here. “The beauty of the world is the co-operation of divine wisdom in creation... The beauty of the world is Christ’s tender smile for us coming through matter. [Christ] is really present in the universal beauty.”⁴⁶

The association with Jesus Christ robs mysticism of the romanticism it and other expressions of pantheism, such as sacramentalism, sometimes take on. “God crosses through the thickness of the world to come to us,” Weil says.⁴⁷ That crossing includes the cross itself. A world afflicted with suffering, pain and injustice is the mystic’s world. Mysticism’s morality is normally replete with such themes. The beauty of the world only renders more poignant its distress—and our complicity.

A Mystical Loving of Creation

Consider old Zossima’s instruction in *The Brothers Karamozov*. Like Hildegard and Weil, Zossima’s spiritual world is equal parts sacramentalism, asceticism and mysticism. But Dostoevsky’s section title gives momentary priority to the mystical: “Of Prayer, of Love and of Contact with Other Worlds.” Note in this passage that love of God and love of nature, ourselves included, are the abiding themes. Note also that these are central to his instruction on sin.

Brothers, be not afraid of men’s sins. Love man even in his sin, for that already bears the semblance of divine love and is the highest love on earth. Love all God’s creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light! Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. And once you have perceived it, you will begin to comprehend it ceaselessly more and more every day. And you will

at last come to love the whole world with an abiding, universal love. Love the animals: God has given them the rudiments of thought and untroubled joy. Do not, therefore, trouble it, do not torture them, do not deprive them of their joy, do not go against God’s intent. Man, do not exalt yourself above the animals: they are without sin, while you with your majesty defile the earth by your appearance on it and you leave the traces of your defilement behind you—alas, this is true of almost every one of us! Love children especially, for they, too, like the angels, are without sin, and live to arouse tender feelings in us and to purify our hearts, and are as a sort of guidance to us. Woe to him who offends a child!⁴⁸

Father Zossima goes on to instruct young monks about the need for *askesis* and forgiveness.

Brothers, love is a teacher, but one must know how to acquire it, for it is acquired with difficulty, it is dearly bought, one must spend a great deal of labour and time on it, for we must love not only for a moment and fortuitously, but for ever. Anyone can love by accident, even the wicked can do that. My young brother asked forgiveness of the birds: it may seem absurd, but it is right nonetheless, for everything, like an ocean, flows and comes into contact with everything else: touch it in one place and it reverberates at the other end of the world. It may be madness to beg forgiveness of the birds, but, then, it would be easier for the birds, and for the child, and for every animal if you were yourself more pleasant than you are now—just a little easier, anyhow. Everything is like an ocean, I tell you. Then you would pray to the birds, too, consumed by a universal love, as though in a sort of ecstasy, and pray that they, too, should forgive your sin. Set great store by this ecstasy, however absurd people may think it.⁴⁹

Zossima himself laid great store by such ecstasy. He also instructed novices in the morality that accompanies it. His long discourse concludes on this note.

The righteous man departs, but his light remains. People are always saved after the death of him who came to save them. Men do not

accept their prophets and slay them, but they love their martyrs and worship those whom they have tortured to death. You are working for the whole, you are acting for the future. Never seek reward, for your reward on earth is great as it is: your spiritual joy which only the righteous find. Fear not the great nor the powerful, but be wise and always worthy. Know the right measure, know the right time, get to know it. When you are left in solitude, pray. Love to fall upon the earth and kiss it. Kiss the earth ceaselessly and love it insatiably. Love all men, love everything, seek that rapture and ecstasy. Water the earth with the tears of your joy and love those tears. Be not ashamed of that ecstasy, prize it, for it is a gift of God, a great gift, and it is not given to many, but only to the chosen ones.⁵⁰

Not all mysticism is so consistently life-charged, so thoroughly drenched, like the figures in Toni Morrison's and Alice Walker's novels, with earth and the tears of joy it evokes. In some mysticism, nature and earth are left behind as discarded lumber. Just as is the case for asceticism and sacramentalism, so also mysticism must be tested to see whether its morality is truly earth-honoring.

That said, Zossima's earth-rich panentheism seems the natural habitat for much Christian mysticism, whether Francis's, Hildegard's, Luther's, or Eckhart's. This means what "panentheism" formally means—the finite bears the infinite, God is present to creation in, through and as creation. It means, in different words, that nature is a translucent order with traces of divine habitation everywhere; nature's diversity is the medium of God's very presence. Mystical experience might begin, then, like Thomas Merton's, in contemplation of a lone cardinal in a locust tree, or the swirl of humanity at the intersection of 4th and Walnut. ("I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream.")⁵¹ Or it might begin with some other encounter—like Dillard and the weasel. But it is no surprise that mystics end their mo-

ment of transcendent encounter by taking to their gardens, taking to the streets, or taking to their pens. All that belongs to the web of all that is, to what Thich Nhat Hanh names "interbeing." All belongs to a living Whole.

Passing the test of whether this ethic is earth-honoring, and thus fit for "the great work," can draw from mysticism's strength as strong, "autonomous" moral agency rooted in this panentheistic apprehension of God and the universe. Such mysticism is the antithesis of the alienated relationships typical of modernity. The universe is a communion of subjects in mystical experience, rather than a collection of objects.⁵² The oceanic feeling, like the ocean itself, encompasses all who dwell therein. The great illusion, mysticism insists, is the illusion of separateness. The great illusion is that the other is object apart from me, rather than subject in whose presence I am who I am.

Alienating Subjects from Objects

"Interbeing" and a "communion of subjects" is far from modernity's apprehension and treatment, however. The standard account, reflected in the Monsanto ad, builds on the famous methodological move of Rene Descartes, and that is not in error. In his quest for certain knowledge Descartes thought it proper "to cast aside the loose earth and sand, that I might reach the rock or the clay."⁵³ The search took him first to his studies, including theology. ("I revered our Theology," he writes, "and aspired as much as any one to reach heaven: but being given assuredly to understand that the way is not less open to the most ignorant than to the most learned, and that the revealed truths which lead to heaven are above our comprehension, I did not presume to subject them to the impotency of my Reason.")⁵⁴ The search sent him traveling as well. "Studying the book of the world, and...gather[ing] some experience"⁵⁵ occupied several years. "[T]he great book of nature" was yet another contender.⁵⁶ Neither the book of the world nor the book of nature availed, however, and his very next words mark his new path and his decisive move: "I at length resolved to make myself an object of study, and to employ all the powers of my mind in choosing the paths I ought to follow."⁵⁷ This turn to the human subject for certain knowledge (it became the signature of the Enlightenment itself) could have transpired in numerous

ways. Descartes'—and modernity's—fatal move was to effect disconnection at every point. “During the nine subsequent years, I did nothing but roam from one place to another, desirous of being a spectator rather than an actor in the plays exhibited on the theatre of the world.”⁵⁸ His life was, he says, “as solitary and retired as in the most remote desert” though not “deprived of any of the conveniences to be had in the most populous cities.”⁵⁹ This was not, we should note, the ascetic's relocation. Descartes is not searching out “the solace of fierce landscapes”⁶⁰ in order to let them, in solitude and prayer, work their ways on egos carefully tuned to their environs for all signs of life and death. His method of radical skepticism was a conscious effort to disconnect mind from body and nature, even society. The *locus classicus* of his method, and of the Enlightenment's turn to the autonomous reason of the autonomous subject as essentially a thinking machine, is this passage.

I observed that, whilst I...wished to think that all was false, it was absolutely necessary that I, who thus thought, should be somewhat; and as I observed that this truth, *I think, hence I am*, was so certain and of such evidence, that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the Sceptics capable of shaking it, I concluded that I might, without scruple, accept it as the first principle of the Philosophy of which I was in search.⁶¹

What immediately follows is as important as this first principle and belongs to it. It is not as oft-noted.

In the next place, I attentively examined what I was, and as I observed that I could suppose that *I had no body, and that there was no world and no place in which I might be*, I could not for all that doubt that *I did not exist*.⁶²

Dissociated mind and the thinking, independent “I” is the foundational reality in this cosmology, the sure ground for knowing the world in pristine detachment from it. It is “I” as immaterial mind and disembodied rational consciousness and process, and is described by Descartes as exactly that.

I thence concluded that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature consists only in think-

ing, and which, that it may exist, has need of no place, nor is dependent on any material thing; so that “I,” that is to say, the mind by which I am what I am, is wholly distinct from the body, and is even more easily known than the latter, and is such, that although the latter were not, it would still continue to be all that is.⁶³

The easy transfer from “I” to the human self and the active human subject implies a human self and subject removed from (the rest of) nature, a self that can at least imagine itself distinct from body and place and without need of them.

The point is not only Descartes' severe mind/body dualism, however. It is the severe and encompassing subject/object stance they create. Disassociated human mind is ranged over against all else as disconnected object, including its own body. Immaterial mind over mechanical matter, as reigning subject poised over against passive object, is the ethic that will issue from this worldview as soon as it finds real-world affinities. It did find those—in the emerging science, technology, and economy of the day. Yet the salient matter at the moment is that subject/object alienation, a profound alienation born of ontological separation of self from body and world, becomes the trademark of this ethic.⁶⁴

Descartes himself, having found bedrock, could not imagine another kind of relationship. Alienation of this sort is ontological; it belongs to *being human* in and over against the rest of the (passive) world. Even fellow animals are for Descartes *automatons*, organic machines cut off not only from reason but consciousness and feeling. By nature alien to us, he considered these co-creatures in the same manner as Immanuel Kant: “So far as animals are concerned, we have no direct duties. Animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man.”⁶⁵ Neither Descartes nor Kant had met Dillard's weasel. Nor could they, given their life-perspective.

Of all this Mab Segrest asks, intriguingly, “what...if Descartes had cultivated a community in the years he cultivated isolation? What would experimenting with radical belief in human contexts, rather than experimenting with acute doubt in isolation, have brought...? Would mind then have been more than rationality, his body easier then to know, if faith had not been so terroristic,

so repressive, and so out of sync with human curiosity?"⁶⁶ We can fruitfully pose additional questions: what if Descartes had viewed mind and consciousness as nature's own means of coming to awareness of itself in one of its own species? What if he had entertained mind and consciousness as nature's own way of being subject, and not object only, of being Thou to I and not It alone? What if natural body and natural mind together were nature's own way with us, rather than material body separated from immaterial mind and de-natured consciousness? And what if Descartes and his disciples had not conceived nature, including fellow mammals, as machine, without feeling, sentience, and the capacity to experience suffering?

The musings of a philosopher and mathematician, undertaken in isolation as a brilliant twenty- and thirty-something, would have meant little, however, had they not joined other streams to carve the channels of a new epoch. It is Descartes' way of knowing—active, knowing human self as subject/ passive other as object—as that becomes the way of modern science, technology and economy that gives his dualism so much purchase on our lives. Karl Marx can be the guide here, at least for the topic of alienation.

Marx was shocked and awed by capitalism, in equal measure.

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraph, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground—what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumber in the lap of social labor?⁶⁷

That was 1848, and, indeed, no prior century had, to that point, entertained such a presentiment. None had subjected nature's forces to so many different ends on such magnitudes of scale. Command of the great oceans, which expanded trade greatly while cutting its costs sharply, accounted for much. So did the movement of labor that large sailing ships accommodated. This meant

mass emigration to establish new settler nations as neo-European outposts. Not a little of it was also the thriving trade in human bodies themselves, regarded simply as "hands." Technological breakthroughs and efficiencies created this new world as well. Entrepreneurial capital supplied motive, means and risk.

The outcome was self-sustaining, world-transforming change. "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products," Marx writes, "chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere."⁶⁸ These bourgeois adventurers are "revolutionaries," Marx says.⁶⁹

To his dying day, Marx never shed his epoch's confidence in the possibilities of great progress through humanly-directed economic transformation. But he was equally impressed, this time negatively, with its shocking downside. The assault on settled community, the atomization of society, the generation of poverty accompanying in tandem the generation of wealth, and the raw exploitation of those who had naught to sell but their labor—all these were centrifugal spin-offs of industrialization's operation in a capitalist mode. 1848 as a culture looks and feels like this.

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.⁷⁰

Descartes' disembodied rationality as a way of seeing the world and acting upon it had by then partnered with scientific, technological, and economic means to control and consume that world. Humans under these conditions have little or no sense of belonging to a wider existence, to the earthly web of life that is home, or to a universe that is home as well. They are alienated from nature and their fellows, disconnected in consciousness from them except as external resources and objective conditions. Fixed relations are swept away, new ones are soon obsolete, and what was holy and sound is profaned or lost.

Marx's point, as distinct from Descartes', is that certain kinds of socio-economic processes create this alien-

ation. Understanding this demands, as required reading, Marx's notes on human nature.

Marx, quite taken with Darwin's new theory of nature as dynamic, evolving, and interdependent, conceives human nature dialectically. Human beings and the rest of nature mutually condition one another in ongoing transformations. Marx discusses these serial transformations as the humanizing of nature and the naturalizing of man.⁷¹ "Man himself is a product of Nature, which has been developed in and along with its environment," he writes. "[Human] history... is a *real* part of *natural history*—of nature developing into man." "The *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present,"⁷² he adds in a line that anticipates conclusions of present-day paleoanthropologists.⁷³ *We are* our bodies, ourselves, as creatures of social-natural evolution.

This humankind/otherkind dialectic holds for every form of human society. Society is in fact the matrix of the ongoing evolution of human nature as part of the wider world. This includes industrial society as a certain historical-natural "moment" in the long sweep of nature's—or earth's—life. "The nature which develops in human history—the genesis of human society—is man's *real* nature; hence nature as it develops through industry, even though in an *estranged* form, is true *anthropological* nature."⁷⁴

But why an "estranged" form in industrialized society, even if genuinely a human one ("anthropological")? Answering that centers in a description of the "objectifying" or "externalizing" that happens, as carefully organized routine, in capitalist orders.

All material production—anywhere, anytime—is "appropriation of nature by the individual within and through a definite form of society."⁷⁵ But the "definite form" that is capitalist creates relationships governed by "exchange value" (money). Both human products and human activities are externalized, commodified and "moneyed" in this kind of society. "The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket," Marx quips.⁷⁶ The consequence is a vast gathering of resources, division of labor, and chain of consumption that transforms nature so as to create a world seemingly external to us. In one descriptor, Marx notes as a prime feature the "autonomization of the world market in which the activity of each individual is included."⁷⁷ Yet the individual feels little part of this

world except as seller of labor or as consumer and client. His or her bonds are still genuinely *human* in that they are part and parcel of a humanly-constructed way of living. But that way of living severs sensuous connections with nature and one another. Human creations, plus labor itself, become abstracted commodities, with no lives attached and none in sight. It matters little to us where something is made, by whom, and with what consequences for community, family, and environs. The commodity is foreground, all else is distant background, exterior to us and rather meaningless. Our social bonds are all "in our pockets."⁷⁸

Since for Marx we are, by nature, inherently *social* beings and not self-standing monads, socio-economic externalizing and objectifying of relationships with one another and the rest of nature also means *self*-alienation. It means the loss of the intersubjectivity that renders us truly human in a normative sense. It means the loss of belonging that constitutes our genuine "species being" (Marx's term). Treating nature "for the first time" in the history of human societies as "purely an object for humankind, purely a matter of utility,"⁷⁹ and reducing our connections with one another to narrow points of labor, goods and services, all of which end up as abstracted or objective commodities for market exchange, may "conquer" nature and generate the new power and wealth which awed Marx. But this unique subject/object ordering of both society and human nature also renders us alien to the rest of nature, to one another and thus to ourselves. We create, *via* the manner of our systemic interaction with all else, both a denaturalized and dehumanized world. Our "species being" is alienated in such externalizing arrangements. Violating nature's subjectivity violates human subjectivity.

Marx's own solution was to try and imagine a society that would alter the way people organized their basic relationships with one another so as to overcome this serial alienation. He did not succeed. He did succeed, however, in showing why and how a homeless and alienated self emerges, a self that feels free "to ransack the world storehouse and to engorge any and every style it comes upon... Nothing is forbidden, all is to be explored."⁸⁰ This disconnected, portable, and alienated self, living in an iron cage of its own making in a world where all is profaned yet somehow seems natural, may even come to regard this "complete emptiness,"⁸¹ or what Max Weber called "this nullity,"⁸² as the

desired end of history and the epitome of civilization. Such is the bitter accomplishment of capitalism as society. The mystic might ask, with Rumi, “Why, when God’s world is so big, did you fall asleep in a prison of all places?”⁸³

Friedrich Engels, Marx’s partner, sums up with even more precision than Marx the trail whose crumbs lead back to Descartes.

To make earth an object of huckstering—the earth which is our one and all, the first condition of our existence—was the last step toward making oneself an object of huckstering. It was and is to this very day an immorality surpassed only by the immorality of self-alienation. And the original appropriation—the monopolization of the earth by a few, the exclusion of the rest from that which is the condition of their life—yields nothing in immorality to the subsequent huckstering of the earth.⁸⁴

How far such huckstering and its ethic of orderly alienation is from the “interbeing” of mysticism and its morality of ontological communion is breathtaking. Yet the world that Marx and Engels described drew not only the protests of mystics. It stoked the ire of prophetic-liberative religious traditions even more. To those we turn.

3. Prophetic-Liberative Practices and Oppression

“Why do the injuries of nature delight you?” Ambrose of Milan asked in the 4th century.

The world has been created for all, while you rich are trying to keep it for yourselves. Not merely the possession of the earth, but the very sky, air and the sea are claimed for the use of the rich few...Not from your own do you bestow on the poor man, but you make return from what is his. For what has been given as common for the use of all, you appropriate for yourself alone. The earth belongs to all, not to the rich.⁸⁵

The heart of Christian prophetic-liberative traditions is justice-centered Christianity. Its key is shared power. Ambrose assumes that so long as rich oppress poor and a good in common is not achieved, so long will “the injuries of nature delight [us].”

A ditty from the era Marx and Engels studied might also have introduced this section. An 18th c. quatrain protesting the English Enclosure Acts goes like this.

The law doth punish man or woman
That steals the goose from the common,
But lets the greater felon loose,
That steals the common from the goose.⁸⁶

Neither theft is commended. But to steal earth as “the one and first condition of our existence” (Engels) is the greater felony. Attaching lot to lot (Isaiah), selling the poor for a pair of shoes (Amos), and possessing for exploitation “the very sky, air and...sea” (Ambrose), is robbery of the kind that cries out to heaven.

Like those of ascetics we will meet momentarily, prophetic railings and renunciations are the rage side of a violated vision and a dream deferred. Hope and redemption (peace and abundance) is the prophets’ baseline. And hope is always hope for the redemption of creation as a whole, the people and the land together. This is redemption as the liberation of all life, from the cell to the community, a struggle inclusive of the poor, the weak, the marginalized, the diseased and the disfigured. It is, not least, liberation of exploited and exhausted nature.

This is where the Bible begins, at least chronologically. It begins with the account of redemption as the securing of freedom for slaves (“redemption” is a word from economic life that refers to buying the freedom of slaves). The God of mercy and compassion, who creates a people from those who were no people and hues a way where there was none, “knows” (experiences) their suffering and goes before in a journey to a teeming land and fertile Sabbath.

Here, in the Scriptural account, is also the prophets’ picture of earth redeemed. It is a picture of abundant life, with all nations coming to the mountain of the Lord.

For the prophets, and for the Hebrew Bible as a whole, the life of faith is justice-centered living. “Righteousness” is the unrelenting theme, “right relations” with all that is—with one another, with the land, with the rest

of nature, with God. The fullest possible flourishing of all life is the very definition of justice in the biblical account. When justice is done, there is *shalom*; until it is done, there can be no peace. It took James Cone to point out what Martin Luther King, Jr. kept insisting. “Justice” is an essential ingredient of Christianity as well as Judaism, but most Christian theologians have failed to say so and to make it their own starting point.⁸⁷ To the extent this is so, the Christian Old Testament itself is abandoned, since righteousness and justice in its pages are at the heart of right relation to God and to earth inclusively. The very calling of the people of God is to serve as a witness to the *ethnoi* (the “nations” or the “Gentiles”) of righteous community.

In the modern era, this ancient tradition gained from subjecting society to the interrogations of a new science. With the great social theorists (Weber, Marx, Durkheim, Sorrel) and the development of social scientific analysis, the prophet’s attention to systems, structures, and policies and how they might be bent in the direction of shared and saving power, attained a certain sophistication. The ways in which, and the degrees to which, human behavior is patterned by the organization of our life together is the sociologist’s insight. *How* life together is organized makes it easier for people to be and do good and harder to be and do evil. Or, conversely, easier to be and do evil and harder to be and do good. The Social Gospel, Christian Realism, and liberation theologies, together with progressive evangelicalism, have all learned that fashioning and refashioning institutions, with special attention to the distribution of power, is critical to righteous living itself.

The point can be underscored dramatically. The prophets are beady-eyed about practices—those concrete habits we live by. Institutionalized practices are the true judges of how we’re doing. Ideological claims, creeds, beliefs, rituals and the noise of solemn assemblies pale alongside plain everyday practice as the measure of our ways. It is as if the prophets said: “Tell us your income and your zip code and we will tell you how you live and the effects it generates. Tell us these and we’ll describe your education, diet, energy use, and transportation. We’ll tell you the kind of housing you have, the company you keep, how you spend your leisure time, and how you treat your neighbors and the world. Whether you’re Lutheran or Buddhist, gentle of

spirit or not, likeable or not, and whatever your race, ethnic identity, and genes, your habitual practices reflect your way of life and how it’s organized. Moreover, the word of Jesus is the same as ours: not those who can claim Abraham as their father, or who call on God as their Lord, are saved, but those who *do* the will of the Father, whoever and wherever they might be.”

The prophetic-liberative tradition not only assumes that practices are telling. It also assumes that no matter how well life is intended, things go awry on a regular basis. Reform is thus a standing need. Again, institutions and how they work get riveted attention. Sometimes prophetic traditions try to institutionalize reforms with conscious regularity. “Jubilee” (Lev. 25) is an example, though perhaps a failed one. (There is little evidence it was ever fully carried out.) In the Jubilee year (50th), land and animals rest, debts are canceled, land is returned to its original owners, and Hebrew slaves are freed. The intent is institutional forgiveness and atonement. These are means of breaking cycles of accumulation and impoverishment and a way to start afresh toward a more just order. Note that in both Jubilee and Sabbath laws (which *were* carried out) regularized practices have in view the land and animals as well as their tillers and keepers.

This leads to another element in this tradition, mentioned briefly above. Just as all creation has standing in, with, and before God, so, too, all creation is the subject of redemption. The moral universe is not the human universe only. It is the socio-communal, the biophysical, even the geo-planetary, together. We earthlings only occupy a wee bit of creation, of course. The third rock from the sun holds few bragging rights in the vast scheme of things. Yet in this tradition, arising at a time when humans knew little of the vastness of the universe, and nothing of its age and its tumultuous journey, its subject is decidedly earth. That remains relevant. Indeed, it is newly so, since this particular planet is now endangered by its power-dominant species. Thus it bears repeating that the subject of those Genesis creation accounts the astronauts chose is not humans, but earth and its Creator. Humans are in fact creatures of earth itself (*haadam*—Adam—is from *adamah*—topsoil). The species’ primordial calling is to till and keep *adamah*. When Cain kills Abel, it is—why are we surprised?—*adamah* that cries out, and it is *adamah* that is cursed by acts of human violence. Accursed, too, are the descendents of

Cain, who are left to wander in the Land of Nod (i.e., the Land of Nowhere) as creatures alienated from earth itself as the source of their own being. Later in the tale, earth shakes and rocks split as Jesus is tortured and dies.⁸⁸ “Even the stones cry out for justice,” in the lyrics of a song about the abuse of earth.⁸⁹ And on the far end of the same tale, Christian scripture closes, not with earth being abandoned but with the curse lifted and earth fulfilled, or redeemed. The New Jerusalem, its trees of life lining the banks of its flowing crystal waters, descends to earth from heaven in a reverse rapture. Then is realized what was always claimed: earth is the very abode of its Creator.

Attention to how society institutionally organizes power in its practices, and attention to the need of reform in the direction of more equitably shared power, so as to incrementally prepare the way for a new Jerusalem, can be illustrated in our own setting by attending to environmental racism. A landmark study, *Toxic Wastes and Race*, was made by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice in 1987. Later studies, including those of the Environmental Protection Agency, confirmed what it showed: while poorer communities fare far worse than affluent ones as sites of commercial toxic waste, poorer peoples of color fare worse than poor whites. Since poor women and children, and especially poor women and children of color, fare worse than men in most communities, negative gender and generational factors correlate as well. In a word, race, class, age and gender are all intersected by systemically biased environmental practices. Different communities suffer different consequences. The wrong side of the tracks has always been more toxic. In short, injustice is authorized. It is authorized by privilege and the way privilege organizes power. That most of the privileged are good people is largely beside the point.

This pattern is not a U. S. phenomenon only. Poorer nations and poorer communities within nations, most often non-white societies and communities, bear disproportionate burdens in widespread global trashing. This holds for communities functioning both as “resource pools” and as “sinks” (sites for waste and pollution). These communities are not the chief *sources* of earth’s distress, even in their own locales. The chief sources are the ranks of socio-economic and racial privilege. But they are the most vulnerable, because of the way systems work.⁹⁰

The prophets’ social analysis and the prophets’ agenda of reform in the direction of more equitably shared power is confirmed in this brief description of environmental racism. So, too, is the prophets’ knowledge that the fate of society and the fate of the land are inextricable from one another. All we need add from the prophets is their insistence that all this is the proper agenda for faith’s own practice. Addressing structural sin as it affects the whole Community of Life is a task of discipleship. Justice, too, must be authorized.

The lament of Ambrose, that the injuries of nature delight us, led him to search for ways to live more lightly, gently, and equitably on the earth. Such is not only the way of the prophets. It is the way of ascetics as well. They may even be its premier exemplars.

4. Asceticism and Consumerism

Santa Barbara, California, was the 1997 site of a “Symposium on the Sacredness of the Environment.” Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior in the Clinton Administration, Carl Pope, then-President of the Sierra Club, and His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox communions, were all present. Santa Barbara, like San Francisco, is not a name that jumps to mind for asceticism as a way of life, at least if the city rather than the saint is in view. Yet it is not surprising that Bartholomew spoke of it, and precisely as an “element in our responsibility toward creation.”⁹¹ Asceticism, alive since the formative years of the Christian movement, has always been about living lightly, gently, and equitably upon the earth. It “requires . . . a voluntary restraint” and “offers practical examples of conservation.”⁹² *Enkrateia*, or self-control, the Patriarch explained, reduces our consumption and ensures that resources are left for others.⁹³ *Enkrateia* also frees us from self-directed neediness by centering us in God and in a disciplined life whereby we “work in humble harmony with creation and not in arrogant supremacy against it.”⁹⁴ It fights the consuming passions of affluence with spiritual richness tethered to material simplicity. It “provides an example whereby we may live simply.”⁹⁵

Asceticism is “not a flight from society and the world,” the black-froked Patriarch went on, but “a communal attitude of mind and way of life that leads

to the respectful use, and not the abuse of material goods.”⁹⁶ By contrast, our prevailing “attitude of mind and way of life” abuses. “Many human beings have come to behave as materialistic tyrants;” they “commit crimes against the natural world” that would be considered anti-social and illegal behavior if done to other humans.⁹⁷ Labeling these crimes against nature “sins,”⁹⁸ Bartholomew explains why this transpires. “Excessive consumption may be understood to issue from a worldview of estrangement from self, from land, from life, and from God,” he says, in the tradition of the desert fathers and mothers. “Consuming the fruits of the earth unrestrained, we become consumed ourselves, by avarice and greed. Excessive consumption leaves us emptied, out-of-touch with our deepest self. Asceticism is a corrective practice, a vision of repentance. Such a vision will lead us from repentance to return, the return to a world in which we give, as well as take from creation.”⁹⁹

A life of taking, rather than reciprocal giving and receiving in roughly equal measure, has been an object of disapprobation from Christianity’s outset. A consistent theme in Christian ethics is that we are all “born to belonging.”¹⁰⁰ Belonging means belonging to the same community, with the same rules and no double standards. It means placing the welfare of the rest of the Community of Life inside the same moral framework as one’s own. Loving “neighbor as self” and self as other is thus the first rule in the formation of Christian character and conscience. One-sided “taking,” rather than reciprocity and mutuality, violates this ethic.

Yet Bartholomew’s specific point was that, to the tutored sensibilities of asceticism, consumerism has always been seen as one of the demons, a force corrosive of character. He is hardly alone. Walter Rauschenbusch, a major figure in the Social Gospel movement and a student of capitalism’s downside, worried at the turn of the last century that competitive commerce creates wants we don’t need and breaks down “the foresight and self-restraint which were the slow product of moral education, and reduces us to the moral habits of savages who gorge today and fast tomorrow.”¹⁰¹ G. K. Chesterton, too, worried about the warping effects of capitalist consumption upon character. He saw not only serious gorging but something in addition. On a visit to Times Square in 1922, he observed that all the “colours and fires” were being attached to an endless flow of

commodities. Light and fire—previously linked to powerful sacred meanings—were now part of the “new illumination” of mass advertising, an “illumination” that “has made people weary of proclaiming great things, by perpetually using it to proclaim small things.”¹⁰² *A life of taking, built upon the carefully cultivated desire for essentially small things that thwart the true self—this is asceticism’s protest.*

Neither Chesterton nor Rauschenbusch would live to see how successful capitalism’s alternative formation of character would be. Habits were generated and desires created whereby materialism and acquisitiveness were rendered systemic requirements of the economy itself. They became requisites, if not actual totems, of the good life as a life of goods. “Avarice and greed” (to recall Bartholomew) were transformed into structural needs. Modern society required them, not as motive and disposition, but as habit and practice. Persons who aren’t greedy by disposition thereby share a way of life similar to those who are. They fly the same planes, drive the same cars, live in the same spacious homes, share the same diet, attain the same degrees, work the same jobs, and live in the same sub-divisions.

Max Weber, a contemporary of Rauschenbusch and Chesterton, saw this captivity coming and gave it classic expression in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. A “disenchanted,” or utterly secular, world fired by “economic compulsion” detaches life from “the highest spiritual and cultural values,” Weber wrote in 1904. This compulsion creates “specialists without spirit” as well as “sensualists without heart” who imagine “this nullity” to be “a level of civilization never before achieved.” “In the field of its highest development, in the United States,” he adds, “the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which often give it the character of sport.”¹⁰³ (One plays the stock market, for example.) Democracy becomes liberty to acquire wealth and use it as one wishes, rather than, say, the use of government as an equalizing force for the common good. Weber’s own question is, what happens when a capitalist order truly takes hold and hard work and daily striving are severed from religious and ethical meaning and from a sense of calling and duty? Specifically, what happens when “victorious capitalism, since it [now] rests on mechanical foundations,”¹⁰⁴ no longer needs the religious asceticism that helped es-

establish it (i.e., people who, with religious zeal, worked hard and saved but led frugal lives)? Wealth for inner-worldly ascetics such as the Puritans was to lie on the shoulders of the saints “like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.” But “fate,” Weber concludes, “decreed that the cloak has become an iron cage.”¹⁰⁵ With the spirit of asceticism and its ethic gone from capitalism, we may, like pushers and users, have become dependent upon a destructive way of life we cannot escape.

But even Weber could not have pictured the sheer scale of economic compulsion as a way of life. Or its planetary downside. The 20th c. saw the economy expand 14-fold, energy use 16-fold, industrial output 40-fold, carbon dioxide emissions 13-fold, water use 8-fold.¹⁰⁶ Weber could not have imagined the contrast with foregoing epochs, either: 10 times more energy use in the 20th c. than over the previous 1,000 years, more tons of topsoil lost than were formed over the previous 1,000 years, and more rocks and soil moved by humans in the 20th c. than by volcanoes, glaciers and tectonic plates!¹⁰⁷ According to Alan Durning, global consumer classes produced and consumed as many good and services in the mere half century from 1950-2000 as throughout *the entire period of history prior to that date*.¹⁰⁸

More on Asceticism and Consumerism

While these are raw, uninterpreted numbers, and the claims of Weber, Rauschenbusch and Chesterton have important qualifiers, Bartholomew’s contention that asceticism and consumerism are contrasting ways of life is surely a safe conclusion. Beginning around 1950 in the United States, consumerism was explicitly promoted as a healthy way of life redounding to the common good. The customer is the responsible, contributing citizen in a consumer’s republic who, *via* the overflow of affluence, furthers democracy and equality. A 1947 photo essay in the nation’s most popular magazine, *Life*, entitled “Family Status Must Improve—It Should Buy More for Itself to Better the Living of Others,” spread “before” and “after” pictures across its pages. “Before” working-class families in modest surroundings became “after” middle-class suburbanites with ranch-style houses, a big yard, and appliance-rich kitchens. *Life* had illustrated what a contemporary Twentieth-Century Fund

study commended: “To achieve a health and decency standard for everyone by 1960, each U. S. family should acquire, in addition to a pleasant roof over its head, a vacuum cleaner, washing machine, stove, electric refrigerator, telephone, electric toaster, and such miscellaneous household supplies as matching dishes, silverware, cooking utensils, tools, cleaning materials, stationery, and postage stamps.”¹⁰⁹ Both *Life* and the Fund mirrored the post-World War II consensus: expanding economic pies will further the general good of the post-war nation as a whole and will thus serve the ideals of greater democracy and equality.

The titles of books by respected public figures had already signaled this emerging consensus: *Mobilizing for Abundance*, by New Dealer Robert Nathan, was published in 1944; *Tomorrow without Fear*, by former head of the wartime Office of Price Administration and later diplomat Chester Bowles, in 1946. The popular press was equally avid. *Bride* magazine’s *Handbook for Newlyweds*, widely consulted in the 1950s, carried this message: “When you buy the dozens of things you never bought or even thought of before, you are helping to build greater security for the industries of this country. What you buy and how you buy it is very vital to your new life and to our whole American way of living.”¹¹⁰

Yet Bartholomew’s point is not simply that asceticism and consumerism are markedly contrasting ways of life. The more serious charge is that consumerism violates an earth-honoring ethic and a morally healthy self.

Further notes on asceticism support this. In ascetic traditions, *enkratia/encrateia* (mastery for moral freedom, or self-control) is achieved by *askesis* (striving, discipline or training, in the manner of an athlete). This *askesis* is not its own end, however. It is not the latest—or, rather, earliest—diet and self-help program. Nor is its *essence* the ongoing protest against a life of taking and against the desire for essentially small things. *Askesis* is the soulcraft of a disciplined life centered in God. Both “annunciation” and “renunciation” are consonant with that life. But “no” to one (distracting) way of life is uttered *on the basis* of “yes” to another (centered) way. A counter-world is thereby nurtured by an ethos alternative to the cravings of the dominant culture.

It is important to emphasize that the “annunciations” are foundational, not the protests. What is harmful and wrong is the contrasting moral pole to what is first cho-

sen as the better way. Francis *chooses* voluntary poverty, even vagabondage, not *in order to* protest consumption. He chooses these because stripping down to such nakedness yields unmediated contact with *the beauty of the world in God* and he desires to live in that beauty. He needs, voluntarily, to truly *be* poor in order to stand with the involuntarily poor and with the self-emptying God of the poor. His own humanity is at stake.

Francis here, like Eastern ascetics, reflects a theology common to much asceticism. The quest is for our “natural” humanity, our “true” self, the kind of creatures we were created as and, deep down, still are. That quest always entails struggles to overcome the demons. Still, exorcism as such isn’t the goal, anymore than poverty is; the restoration of Adam is. Eden is in view, and flashes of its ambit of harmony and innocent desire can be realized in spare and mindful living.

Such freedom and innocent desire will not last, however. The “old” (but not aboriginal) self re-emerges, ready to do vice-and-virtue battle all over again. The Christian life is thus always one of contestation and high stakes, with the rigor of training essential to moral freedom and self-control.

In sum, a life centered in God frees our “natural” humanity through sound discipline. That discipline entails specific renunciations, renunciations that, if foregone, lead to practices issuing in a false self who acts unjustly. Thus fasting counters gluttony, vowed poverty counters possessiveness, frugality counters excess, seclusion and solitude counter excitement and frenzy, prayer counters false allegiance, a communism of labor and love counters tedium and fixed social status. And while the details of *askesis* vary from time to time and place to place, soulcraft of this sort always includes disciplining the ego and the will as they face ostentation, conspicuous consumption, loose sex, and other errant habits of the surrounding world.

Differently said, asceticism as a way of life in God includes the “outward” details of any way of life—clothing and diet, art and architecture, craft and trade, agricultural and healing practices, guiding ritual—as well as the “inward” details—godly qualities of psyche, character and spirit nurtured by sometimes arduous disciplines. Regulating all the details, inner and outer, is a notion of the Edenic or “natural” state as one free of non-essentials and awake to true, innocent desire.

What must not escape us, given a planet in jeopardy, is that asceticism’s severe “not-of-this-world” dualism never means “not-of-nature.” On the contrary, practitioners of asceticism have, with all due deliberation, sought out desert and mountain wilderness, or other fierce and remote terrain like St. Patrick’s “tempestuous winds,” “the deep salt sea,” and “the old, eternal rocks.”¹¹¹ Or they have created still places, oases of serenity, as patches of Eden amidst throbbing centers of (suspect) civilization. In all these, a detailed sense and love of place, attuned to all signs of local life, mark ascetic affairs with the landscape, as it does their meticulous attention to garden, field, and craft. “The desert a city,” St. Athanasius would write in his famous *Life of St. Anthony*. Or, as he penned in his *Festal Epistle* about Israel, but true with equal force for early monks—they “walked in the wilderness as an inhabited place. For although, according to the mode of living customary among men, the place was desert; yet, through the gracious gift of the law, and also through their intercourse with angels, it was no longer desolate, but inhabited, yea, more than inhabited.”¹¹²

Ascetics often ascribe holiness or sanctity to their “inhabited, yea, more than inhabited,” wild places. Not by chance, then, does desert asceticism issue in desert spirituality and mountain asceticism in mountain spirituality. Images of the divine in art, hymnody, chant, and prayer mirror the land and its life. Sacred space is outdoors, among the elements, not indoors only.

High Irish crosses are a dramatic example. A sun disk rests at the center of the crossing itself, with flora, fauna, biblical figures, and the endless Celtic knot carved in the eternal stone from top to bottom and left to right. The crosses stand in the open, to mark the damp green hills as holy ground and places of meditation.

Yet at center is always a life in God. Apart from this, the rest has no meaning, no real point of lasting reference. Kathleen Norris’s last entry in *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* captures this well, if cryptically, just as it captures the power of place.

Weather Report: December 7
3:00 A. M.

Unable to sleep, I’ve been reading the words of a modern monk:
“You have only to let the place happen to you...the loneliness, the

silence, the poverty, the futility, indeed the silliness of your life.”

A warm front is passing through. The great vault of sky is

painted with high, feathery clouds; the ribs of a leviathan, or angels' wings.

I can no longer see my breath. I stand in the yard a long time, looking at the night.

One of the old ones was asked, “What is it necessary for the monk to be?” And he said, “According to me, alone with the Alone.”¹¹³

Monasticism is one obvious strand in Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Anglican communions, but ascetic Protestant communities have shown similar traits, especially communities of the Radical Reformation. In recent decades covenanting communities in urban areas, determined to live simpler, less addicted, and more responsible post-materialist lives, have also undertaken what ascetic Christian community has always sought to do: reject as normative the dominant culture while embodying an alternative in the details of its own more disciplined, spare life. These details have, as indicated, included treatment of nature as intimate community, even in dangerous places. Animals, for example, have always enjoyed the equivalent of “animal rights” with the saints, even when “rights” as a term was never used. The effort, to repeat, is always to live more lightly, more gently, and more equitably on the earth.

If a one-sentence conclusion emerges from ascetic traditions *vis-a-vis* the ravages of affluence (where wants exceed needs) and the ravages of poverty (where needs exceed resources), it is this. *An asceticism that loves the earth fiercely in a simple way of life, with disciplined and heightened senses for God's presence in all life*, is the asceticism needed now.

Against those who advocate such asceticism, it will not do to argue, as many have since the 18th c. and especially since 1950, that the pursuit of wealth under modern conditions fosters the well-being rather than the corruption of society. Ascetics counter that even when expanding pies replace fixed ones the ancient judgment still holds: service to wealth is spiritually-morally destructive for society as well as individual. Collective and individual character is malformed. Social justice and the common good continue to go unrealized. Severe social and economic inequalities persist in the U.S. of the 21st

c., for example, even though gross prosperity shot up in the decades following World War II and consumerism has reigned supreme since.

Present advocates of simple living also point out what ancient ascetics could not have. Namely, off-the-charts consumerism is not only socially corrosive, it is ecologically unacceptable. Costs of growth exceed gains to the point of out-and-out unsustainability. Rather than the well-being of the whole Community of Life increasing, the ranks of some are enhanced at the expense of earth itself. The present-day ascetic's conclusion is like that of prophetic-liberative traditions: conversion to earth and its requirements is a comprehensive systemic need that plays itself out in our daily habits.

“Heightened senses for God's presence in all life,” an essential of the earth-honoring asceticism noted above, nicely describes sacramentalism, mysticism, and prophetic-liberative traditions as well. It is a worthy place to end.

Conclusion

To believe in God and God's presence in all life is to disbelieve in the necessity of the world as it is. It is not to reject the world as such—that continual Christian heresy and temptation. Ours is a good world gone wrong, not a wrong world. And to believe in God and God's presence in all life is to offer more, a “more” already borne by earth's tenacious promise of ongoing and abundant life. Here, in believing in God's presence and disbelieving in the necessity of the world as it is, is the very source and energy of earth-honoring religious ethics. Here—in sacramentalism, mysticism, asceticism, and prophetic-liberative practices—are also potentially earth-honoring ways of life that draw from shared wells and deep-running waters.

To be certain, none of these traditions has perfect pitch. Certainly none is unsullied. Many prophetic-liberative strands, for example, have yet to overcome the small-minded anthropocentrism of many well-intended, justice-oriented traditions. And numerous streams of all these traditions still leave out much of the universe, to recall Weil's complaint about a Christianity not yet catholic. All of them know the temptation of which Thomas Merton writes—“to diddle around in

the contemplative life, making itsy-bitsy statues.”¹¹⁴ Still, those ascetic gymnasts of the soul powerfully expose consumerism as “the real tinsel” behind all the false tinsel¹¹⁵ and the source of a diminished self living a life of taking. Sacramentalists rightly cultivate critical virtues of humility, care, awe, and respect in a world that is itself an extraordinary stanza in the “hymn of the universe,”¹¹⁶ a world worthy of so much more than the ransacked stage-and-storehouse made of it. Mysticism’s ontological communion counters layer upon layer of earth-destructive alienation and lives out another possibility quietly, resolutely, gently. And prophets show how carefully constructed power either fractures or promotes justice for the Community of Life.

Such traditions, even when badly tarnished, are places to stand. They carry with them the kind of tenacity and devotion that religion, and little else, provides. They offer the rich resources of millennial efforts that nurture the moral-esthetic emotions needed to guide and orient our lives. Not least, they are treasures shared by most religions. As such, alliances *bridging* world faiths might be forged to counter consumerism, utilitarianism, alienation, and oppression. Alliances of this kind are the next task for religious communities serious about saving the planet.

Endnotes

1. This is the title of the op-ed column by Thomas Friedman cited below.

2. Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1951), p. 101.

3. Hendrik Hertzberg, “The Talk of the Town,” *The New Yorker*, March 17, 2003: 68.

4. The Antarctica contingent consisted of fifty scientists at the McMurdo Station on the Ross Sea.

5. The phrase is Alan Paton’s, about South Africa under apartheid, in *Cry the Beloved Country*. Shridath Ramphal makes the connection between country and planet explicit in his book, *Our Country, The Planet: Forging a Partnership for Survival* (Washington, DC: 1992). The book is dedicated to the memory of Barbara Ward and Rene Dubos and “to all who continue their mission for Our Country, The Planet.”

6. Ibid.

7. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, translated and introduced by David Magarshack (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), 2: 426.

8. Fineberg as cited by Thomas Friedman, “Drilling in the Cathedral,” *The New York Times*, 2 March, 2003: A23.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. This is also Thomas Berry’s title. See Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999). Berry writes that “[h]istory is governed by those overarching movements that give shape and meaning to life by relating the human venture to the larger destinies of the universe.” (p. 1.) He names these movements “the Great Work” of a people or an epoch and argues that “[t]he Great Work now...is to carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner.” (p. 3.)

12. See, as just one example, the information available at www.monasticdialog.com.

13. “Saving Souls and Salmon,” *The New York Times* Week in Review, 22 October, 2000: 5.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Cited from Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Toronto: between the lines press, 1997), 1. Shiva is citing the bull’s text from Walter Ullmann’s *Medieval Papalism*. She doesn’t supply the bibliographic data.

17. Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 12.

18. Cited by Bob Herbert, “Looking Back at an Ugly Time,” *The New York Times*, 24 February, 2003: A17. The influence of Buckley’s “Great Chain” Catholicism is found in much of his writing. See, for example, his *God and Man at Yale: the superstitions of “academic freedom”* (Chicago: Regnarey/Gateway, 1977).

19. U. S. Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth—An Invitation to Reflection and Action in Light of Catholic Social Teaching* (Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, November 14, 1991), I. A. Aims of This Statement, p. 2. John Hart’s forthcoming *What Are They Saying About Environmental Theology?* (Paulist Press, 2004) is a detailed guide to Roman Catholic social teaching on the environment. I have drawn upon Hart’s draft manuscript here.

20. U. S. Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth*, Signs of the Times, p. 1.

21. U. S. Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth*, I., D. A Call to Reflection and Action, p. 3.

22. U. S. Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth*, III. Catholic Social Teaching and Environmental Ethics, p. 6.

23. The address of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Environmental Symposium is available in John Chryssavgis, ed., *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003). This citation is from p. 166 of the pre-publication manuscript, courtesy of John Chryssavgis.

24. Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek: A Mystical Excursion into the Natural World* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 67. Another passage reads: “This, then, is the extravagant landscape of the world, given, given with pizzazz, given in good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.” (p. 149)

25. This is a reference to the famous description by Max Weber at the conclusion of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and to which we will refer in the discussion below.

26. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translation, prologue and notes by Walter Kaufman (New York: Scribner, 1970). I-It and I-Thou are the “primary words.” They are hyphenated because they are constitutive of “I.” “I” is never “I” of itself. “I” is created in living relationships of subject/subject (I-Thou) and subject/object (I-It).

27. June 2, 1998.
28. Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 278.
29. Ibid. The frontispiece of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, “The Tree With Lights,” is another mystical account of Dillard’s that arrived abruptly. She excerpted it from a later passage in the book. “One day I was walking along Tinker Creek thinking of nothing at all and I saw the tree with the lights in it. I saw the backyard cedar where the mourning doves roost charged and transfigured, each cell buzzing with flame. I stood on the grass with the lights in it, grass that was wholly fire, utterly focused and utterly dreamed. It was less like seeing than like being for the first time seen, knocked breathless by a powerful glance. The flood of fire abated, but I’m still spending the power...I had been my whole life a bell, and never knew it until at that moment I was lifted and struck.” n.p.
30. Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 1.
31. Simone Weil’s delightful image is one she takes from a story of the Brothers Grimm. A little tailor competes with a giant to see which is the stronger. The giant throws a stone so high and far that it takes a long while to return to earth. The little tailor hurls a small bird that does not come down at all, at least not anywhere in sight. The soul, Weil says, is that bird. From Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. by Emma Craufurd, with an Introduction by Leslie A. Fiedler (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1951), 127.
32. Roger Gottlieb, “The Transcendence of Justice and the Justice of Transcendence: Mysticism, Deep Ecology, and Political Life,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67/1, March 1999: 150.
33. Ibid., 149.
34. The image is from the Afghan poet Rumi, cited by Soelle in her Introduction: “Why, when God’s world is so big, did you fall asleep in a prison of all places?” P. 1 of *The Silent Cry* (Fortress).
35. Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 35.
36. Janet Ruffing, R. S. M., ed., *Mysticism and Social Transformation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), xi. Emphasis in the original.
37. Simone Weil, *Two Moral Essays* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1981), 5-6.
38. Ibid., 6.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 7.
41. Ibid.
42. See her discussion in the essay, “Forms of the Implicit Love of God,” the section on “The Love of Our Neighbor,” in *Waiting for God*, 84-99.
43. Hildegard of Bingen, *The Book of Divine Works*, excerpts from the section, “The source of all being,” in Bowie, Fiona and Davies, Oliver, eds., *Hildegard of Bingen: mystical writings* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 91.
44. Weil, *Waiting for God*, 101.
45. Weil, *Waiting for God*, xxxiii of the Introduction, as cited by Leslie Fiedler.
46. Weil, *Waiting for God*, 104.
47. Weil, *Gravity & Grace*, trans. by Arthur Wills with an introduction by Gustave Thibon (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1952), 142.
48. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamozov*, Vol. 1, 375-376.
49. Ibid., 376.
50. Ibid., 379.
51. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, (London: Sheldon Press, 1965), 153-154. 4th and Walnut is the intersection in Louisville, Kentucky, where Merton, a Trappist monk at nearby Gethsemane monastery, had this mystical vision.
52. The language is again that of Thomas Berry in *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*.
53. Rene Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason, and Seeking Truth in the Sciences* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1927), 33.
54. Ibid., 7-8.
55. Ibid., 10.
56. Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, Laurence J. Lafleur, trans. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), 8.
57. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 10.
58. Ibid., 30.
59. Ibid., 33.
60. The reference is to Belden C. Lane’s *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
61. Descartes, 35.
62. Ibid. Emphasis added.
63. Ibid, 35-36.
64. Fairness to Descartes requires that we report on the rest of his enterprise. On the basis of clear and distinct ideas working upward as a “chain of truths” (p. 44) from this first principle, he in effect builds up much of the world he has doubted. Thus he acknowledges “that we have a body, and that there exist stars and an earth, and such like.” (p. 41) He goes on to prove, to the satisfaction of his own mind, the existence of both God and the soul. The point, however, is that the fundamental relationship we are describing is not thereby altered. This remains the knowledge of a disembodied and “unearthly” mind set over against all that it is not.
65. Immanuel Kant, “Duties to Animals and Spirits,” in *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. by Louis Infield (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963) 239.
66. Mab Segrest, *Born to Belonging: Writings on Spirit and Justice* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 12.
67. Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1954), 23.
68. Karl Marx, *The Community Manifesto*, in Jon Elster, ed., *Karl Marx: A Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 227.
69. Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, in Elster, ed., *Karl Marx: A Reader*, 226.
70. Ibid., 227.
71. See Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. by Martin Milligan and ed. by Dirk J. Struik (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 101-114.
72. Both this quotation and the one immediately preceding it are from *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* as a selection in Howard L. Parsons, *Marx and Engels on Ecology* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977). Parsons only gives the inclusive pages of the *Manuscripts*, however, and not the individual pagination of the original. In Parsons’ compilation the latter sentence is on p. 215, the former on p. 217. The inclusive pages from the *Manuscripts* that Parsons has selected are 132-146.

73. See the fascinating paleoanthropological account of the human/other nature dialectic as creative of human being in Rick Potts, *Humanity's Descent: The Consequences of Ecological Instability* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1996).

74. Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, as cited by Parsons, p. 217.

75. Marx, in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, in Elster, ed., 7.

76. Marx, *Grundrisse*, in Elster, 48.

77. *Ibid.*, 52.

78. This bare sketch of social bonds and what happens to them in capitalist society is described at great length by Marx in different volumes. See, among other places, the section in *Capital* on "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof." It begins this way: "A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties." Karl Marx, in *Capital*, as selected by Elster, 63.

79. Marx, *Grundrisse*, in Parsons, 410.

80. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 13.

81. In the *Grundrisse* Marx writes against those who desire to return to some pre-capitalist order. He thinks it both romantic and impossible. But he also writes against those who think the particular stage of human evolution brought by capitalism is the final one. "It is as ridiculous to yearn [for the former] as it is to believe that with this complete emptiness history has come to a standstill." p. 53 of the *Grundrisse* as selected by John Elster, ed., in *Karl Marx: A Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). The parallels between Marx's discussion in these pages and Weber's conclusions about "specialists without spirit" and "sensualists without heart" who imagine "this nullity" the high point of "civilization" are fascinating, even though Weber is writing in conscious opposition to Marx.

82. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons from the 1904 German edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 182.

83. From the above-noted introduction in Soelle's *The Silent Cry*, 1.

84. Friedrich Engels, *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, in Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan and ed. Dirk J. Struik (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 210.

85. From *De Nabuthe Jezraelita 3, 11*, as cited by Rosemary Radford Ruether in "Sisters of Earth: Religious women and ecological spirituality," *The Witness* (May, 2000): 14.

86. Author unknown, taken here from the frontispiece of Howard L. Parsons, compiler and editor, *Marx and Engels on Ecology* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977).

87. See James Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), xvi-vii. "It is one thing to think of Martin King as a civil rights activist who transformed America's race relations and quite another to regard the struggle for racial justice as having theological significance....While he never regarded himself as an academic theologian, he transformed our understanding of the Christian faith by making the practice of justice an essential ingredient of its identity...It could be argued that Martin King's contribution to the identity of Christianity in America and the world was as far-reaching as Augustine's in the fifth century and Luther's in the fourteenth. Before King, no Christian theologian showed so conclusively in his actions and words the great contradiction between racial segregation and the gospel of Jesus."

88. Matthew 27:51b.

89. By Ray McKeever.

90. A more extended discussion is found in the chapter on "Envi-

ronmental Apartheid" in Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 75-89. The discussion above draws heavily, and sometimes directly, on this chapter.

91. "Address of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Environmental Symposium," Santa Barbara Greek Orthodox Church, Santa Barbara, California, 8 November, 1997, p. 164 of pre-publication manuscript, courtesy of John Chryssavgis, ed. *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer* (Eerdmans, 2003).

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*

94. *Ibid.*

95. *Ibid.* One of the expressions of this ancient tradition that became popular was the call of Australian biologist and lay theologian Charles Birch to an assembly of the World Council of Churches: "Live simply that others may simply live."

96. *Ibid.*

97. *Ibid.*

98. *Ibid.*, 165.

99. *Ibid.*, 164.

100. I borrow the title of the book by Mab Segrest, *Born to Belonging: Writings on Spirit and Justice* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002). Segrest's own inspiration is the African concept of *ubuntu*. "It's a simple notion: we are all born to belonging, and we know ourselves as humans in just and mutual relationship to one another." (P. 2.)

101. Cited from William Leach, *Land of Desire* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 192.

102. Cited from Leach, *Land of Desire*, p. 348.

103. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 182. "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved" is itself a quotation in Weber's text. But he does not cite its source.

104. *Ibid.*, 181-182.

105. *Ibid.*, 181. "Like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment" is a quotation Weber takes from *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, chp. xii, by the prominent 17th c. Puritan divine, Richard Baxter.

106. J. R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000), xv-xvi.

107. See the section, "Earth Movers," in McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*, pp. 30-49.

108. Alan T. Durning, *How Much Is Enough?* (London: Earthscan, 1992), 38.

109. The *Life* essay and Twentieth-Century Fund study are cited by Lizabeth Cohen in "A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America," *Miller Center Report*, A Publication of the Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, Volume 19, No. 1, Winter, 2003: 6.

110. *Handbook for Newlyweds* is cited by Cohen, "A Consumer's Republic," p. 7, as are the titles by Nathan and Bowles.

111. From the text of St. Patrick's breastplate hymn, "I Bind unto Myself Today."

112. Cited by Philip Rousseau in *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 11-12.

113. Kathleen Norris, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), n.p. Norris is likely aware that the word "monk" is from *mono*, meaning "alone."

114. Cited, without bibliographic data, by Annie Dillard in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 276.

115. With apologies to H. L. Mencken, who is to have said this about Hollywood.

116. The reference is to the book by the French priest and paleontologist, Pierre de Chardin, himself both sacramentalist and Catholic earth mystic. See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, English translation by William Collins Sons, London and Harper & Row, New York, 1965.

