The ecological Christ: Discerning an ecological consciousness in the Sermon on the Mount

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THE ECOLOGICAL CHRIST:
DISCERNING AN ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS
IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

BY

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DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

To George and Nicholas
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Clearly this dissertation journey - from inception to binding – has not been one I’ve traveled alone. I want to express my gratitude to those who helped me along the way. In particular, I must thank Marian Brink, Dr. Paul Brockelman, and Rev. Dr. Mary Westfall, for suggesting my inquiry into this new and dynamic Ph.D. program in the first place, and encouraging me to trust the doors to open along the way;

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ABSTRACT

THE ECOLOGICAL CHRIST: DISCERNING AN ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

By

Nancy J. Miaoulis

University of New Hampshire, May 2005

Ecology is the science that studies the function of communities of life within ecosystems. These systems are bound by an affirmation of relationship. Such relationships are very complex and every part of them is dependent on every other part if they are to maintain the integrity of nature that allows us all to survive.

The adoption of the four principles of ecology: everything is connected to everything else; everything has to go somewhere; nature knows best; and there is no such thing as a free lunch – have been suggested to ensure the survival of all species. However, knowledge of scientific findings of both environmental problems and lasting solutions has had little impact on the way humans conduct their lives. Instituting an ecological consciousness will require a change in the values we commit to and the lens of ethics we apply to situations.
Through a comprehensive literature review and a series of interviews with experts from the fields of ecology, theology, and ethics this dissertation will determine:

- What is the core of ecological thought?
- Are the principles of the Beatitudes applicable to the issues of ecology?
- Can these principles induce a spiritual/behavioral paradigm shift sufficient to make a lasting and positive impact on the life of the universe?
CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

I remember when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. I watched him on television. The day was July 20, 1969. I sat with my family as we witnessed the liftoff and flight of Apollo 11, received the pictures of space taken by the astronauts, and shared in the historic journey onto the moon’s surface. At the time I did not understand exactly what it was that was happening. I was a child. But I knew that whatever we were seeing was important, because when I looked over at my father I saw that he was crying. My father didn’t cry easily. But there was something about that odyssey into space that touched him deeply. My father’s tearful reaction to the television footage made a lasting impression on me. For months afterward, I would sit alone outside in the dark and look up at the stars, remembering my father’s response and filled with awe and wonder at the beauty of the night sky and the mystery of how things came to be. Often on those nights I would beat out a rhythm on an old tin coffee can – a child’s attempt, I imagine, to contact a great incomprehensible “something” that I thought inspired all the emotion of those days. With the perspective of time, I have come to believe that every night that I tried to will my soul to reach out and up, unbeknownst to me the Universe was at the same time reaching down and within. It was perhaps the first identifiable personal experience of knowing an
ancient, legitimate, and intimate connection – my tin can beating out the rhythm of the Universe, my soul resonating with all that has ever been.

Stories shared by other people about experiences from those days often recall that time as being similarly emotional – a time marked by profound reflection and impact. Neil Armstrong’s “one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind” invited all of us to walk with him if we wanted to. It was during this trip of Apollo 11 that the now infamous picture of our planet was taken from the orbiting command module.

“Earthrise over lunar horizon” (Figure 1) is one of the most famous images returned from space. Judging by its enduring and widespread presence in everything from religious rituals to t-shirts and bumper stickers, that powerful image of our planet can be credited with not only spawning a movement (Earth Day 1970 is often seen as the beginning of the American ecological movement), but also with presenting to millions of people an opportunity to re-imagine the human species and this planet we call home. Wolfgang Sachs remarks:

The photo is a powerful symbol that contains the contradictions, and unresolved tensions of a globalized world. (On the one hand) it offers visual proof of the belief that there are, ultimately, limits to its carrying capacity...and demonstrates so clearly that all effects of human action will inevitably be played out within these limits. (On the other) the blue planet suggests a common destiny for all humanity and intimates the social unity of all its inhabitants.¹

James Parks Morton, former dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, once said that the space age helped us to see that we are part of a living web, that our journey into space uncovered a forgotten truth: people began to understand in a telling way that they are one of many, many kinds of different species: an ancient understanding that he believes has come back most particularly through images of earth from space. Although such insights may not have had the sweeping and lasting impact on people’s ecological understanding and behavior that Morton imagined would result, still such experiences made a

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2 Photograph provided courtesy of NASA, images.jcs.nasa.gov, image number AS11-44-6552.
lasting mark. What began as a triumphant act of its own merit, "We walked on the moon!" metamorphosed — even if subconsciously — into something much richer and deeper for numbers of people. For them, those days in the late 60's began the cultivation or rediscovery of an inner sense of our relationship to the Universe. Just as human bodies circulate blood, oxygen, and carbon dioxide at a certain scale, we came to know that at the same time the entire earth's atmosphere circulated carbon dioxide, oxygen, and many, many other gases and we recognized that the earth's system is alive. The very fact that we could make this connection is a witness that our historical, experiential knowledge of that which is created and that which creates — a powerful, mystical, humbling, intuitive knowing of the Universe — has not been ultimately lost to us. It has not been lost because it really cannot be, for although many humans do not consciously operate within this assumption, the Universe is at the very heart of things — that which orders the world and sets it in motion. Relationship is a principle of the Universe despite our culture's adoption and internalization of other kinds of values: a sense of control, for example, as well as certainty and order. That many have buried but not relinquished this particular sense of relationship may ultimately offer the power and ability to help us realign ourselves to our place in the Universe and one day change us at the deepest levels necessary for all of life to flourish. As Dean Morton commented, "The view from space gave us a gift of realizing that every piece is needed and it all fits together, and you are aware of
this interdependence of one upon another and another. We are all there at once. From afar we behold the watery cradle where life itself began."³

From these revelatory experiences, people began to ask "what sort of home do we hope this planet will be?" To even ask this question was a giant leap for life on earth. But although contemporary ecology may have been energized by this leap, its roots - firmly and deeply planted in this very same question - had sprouted long before. The development of environmental perspectives in the United States can be traced through the historical insights of many environmental figures.⁴ For example, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were the first notable Americans to insist, a century and a half ago, that other uses might be made of nature than had been imagined as of late. Emerson suggested that nature could be a temple in which to draw near and commune with God. Thoreau argued that in wildness lay the preservation of the world. John Muir turned the philosophies of Emerson and Thoreau into a national campaign for the appreciation and preservation of wild nature. And finally, it was Aldo Leopold whose "land ethic" declared that human beings were members of a "biotic team," plain members and citizens of one humming biotic community. Thereby, we and other citizen-members of the biotic community sink or swim together. Recognizing that all of creation has intrinsic, and not just instrumental, value, we eventually arrived at the most basic ecological truth regarding our earth home:


all living beings are related in some manner to each other and to their environment. **We are ultimately a part of all other things.**

Ecologists have long been called upon to consider what qualities are required to constitute good life. It is also true that long before we coined the word “ecology,” ever since the human species discovered how to use their reflective capacities and gifts, people in every time and land have pondered this very subject – sometimes with regard for all species, and sometimes for just a select few. Once it became possible to document ideas, humans have recorded their evolving relationship with the created order through a variety of media including art, literature, music, movement, and religion. From cave drawings to contemporary rituals, these records have reflected a deep knowing that we are in relationship with the Universe – that, historically, we have accepted some kind of nexus between spirit and nature. For years the sacred aspect of nature was understood to be one and the same sacred aspect found within ourselves. And as people lived at home on the earth and came to love it, their ecological thoughts embraced and reflected these principles.

E.O. Wilson wrote:

We are in the fullest sense a biological species and will find little ultimate meaning apart from the remainder of life. The fiery circles of disciplines will be closed if science looks at the inward journey of an artist’s mind, making art and culture objects of study in the biological mode, and if the artist and critic are informed of the workings of the mind and the natural world as
illuminated by the scientific method. In principle, at least, nothing can be denied to the humanities, nothing to science.\textsuperscript{5}

The relationship between disciplines that Wilson describes underscores the most basic feature of the biological world: that nothing lives in isolation. Organisms of the same kind live together in populations that are always interacting with other populations of other kinds. None of these organisms could live as it does without the others. They share a common living space. They eat one another and are eaten. They provide shelter for one another and in turn are sheltered. In essence, they provide stages for one another in which each acts out the drama of life. Therefore, if we are in the fullest sense a biological species, as Wilson asserts, then, it is interdisciplinary perspectives and reflections that will provide the necessary stages in which to fully reflect upon and inform about the universal concern that the environment has become.

But in recent years, voices of critique have been raised against contemporary ecology. By its very nature, ecology must be understood as a multi-dimensional reality. However, some people have charged that where the discipline once rightly claimed its legitimacy from its interdisciplinary self-understanding, over a period of time our culture's value systems have changed ecology's focus, teaching, and purpose. While it is true that one can find evidence that the science of ecology has been willing to re-engage itself in cross-discipline conversations – particularly as evidenced by many contemporary

\textsuperscript{5} Edward O. Wilson, \textit{The Diversity of Life}, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, 81.
programs teaching environmental education, the pendulum of ecological thought and praxis still has a long way to swing before unilateral ecological results are made manifest in the quality of life for all. People need to change.

In his book "What Are People For?," Wendell Berry calls into question the way human energies in recent history have been bent to the purposes of an extractive economy determined to dominate nature and increase the material wealth and security of our own species. He suggests that human welfare and meaning are located not in the values of the marketplace but in the relationships that can emerge among people and landscapes, where care and continuity rather than commercial success are the central aims.\textsuperscript{6} And Wolfgang Sachs offers these thoughts: "The Western development model is fundamentally at odds with both the quest for justice among the world's people and the aspiration to reconcile humanity and nature. My inquiries turn around one nagging suspicion: there has been a general assimilation of environmental concerns into the rhetoric, dynamics, and power structures of developmentalism."\textsuperscript{7} Without its interdisciplinary context, particularly the framework of an acceptable cosmology, ecology has lost its unique ability to communicate the basic structure of things – the Universe, itself. "Without this fundamental context we have no way of thinking about the Universe in anything other than a scientific manner,"\textsuperscript{8} remarks Thomas Berry. The problem, however, is that the Universe is not self-

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{6}Wendell Berry, \textit{What Are People For?}, Canada: HarperCollinsCanada, LTD. 2000.

\textsuperscript{7}Sachs, \textit{Planet Dialectics}, 11.

\textsuperscript{8}Thomas Berry, interview by author, notes, Greensboro, NC, November 17, 2004.
\end{flushright}
explanatory. It cannot be described merely by statistics and data, but additionally needs the language of wonder and beauty, best communicated through a quality of the mind that is poetic and rhetorical in its visioning. Whether or not ecology has welcomed the easy legitimacy that hard science has extended it, willingely abandoning its interdisciplinary roots for something more easily defined and more readily respected, clearly some believe that as the discipline evolved, ecology has often been unable or unwilling to hold these principles as self evident anymore. As Vaclav Havel writes, "The relationship to the world that modern science fostered and shaped...is missing something. It fails to connect with the most intrinsic nature of reality and with natural human experience. It produces a state of schizophrenia: man as an observer is becoming completely alienated from himself as a being."  

Ecologists have long been teaching us that the earth is in trouble: its air, water, and ground is polluted; flora and fauna are disappearing; open space and available resources are shrinking. These things are happening because human activities have profound impacts on our planet. How great are these impacts? One scientist has suggested that humans may now be the world's dominant evolutionary force. But despite our destructive beliefs and practices, hope - for our species and the planet - continues to spring eternal among many leading scientists. For example, in a recent lecture at Sweet Briar College (October

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2004), the entomologist E.O. Wilson declared his hope in humanity's ultimate tendency toward survival and its ability to do what was necessary and right to ensure a good life. Despite all that we have done (and continue to do) in violation of the earth, the biodiversity crisis, he claimed, may spur revolution in human attitudes toward the natural world. Our awareness of growing outward threats: species extinction, ozone depletion, loss of wild habitat to human population growth, and resource consumption, may be what creates the psychological tension needed to help people re-evaluate how they relate to nature. With that in mind, ecology continues to suggest that we can arrest or in some cases reverse this process/crisis if we live according to its four basic principles.

Unfortunately, many people seem incapable or uninterested in responding in ways that would create lasting solutions. The facts of nature's distress and humanity's contribution to that distress that ecology presents do not appear to have an impact on people's values and consequent behavior. How can people be inspired to pay attention at our deepest levels to all that we are and all that is around us, and to foster the discovery of gestures that honor the world? The Islamic scholar Sayed Nasyr once said, "There is no use trying to solve ecological problems on the basis of science based on exclusion of sacred toward nature."¹¹ I believe him.

Humankind’s theological history, like our ecological one, is a chronicle of the struggle to recognize our intimate relationship with the rest of the created order and how to translate that truth into something tangible. Within this history, Christian thought and praxis has made significant contributions to the pool of inspirational guidance intended to influence human behavior in matters of the earth. Critics have argued that the Christian tradition is suspect on the matter of the environment, and rightly so. Sadly, it must be said that biblical passages have been used by some people to support less than beneficial responses to the environment including, among other ideas, that nature is corrupt or imperfect and that humans have a right to dominate other species. But, alongside these ecologically negative interpretations of the morals and values of the Bible, there have also been Christian interpretations that put before us a worldview in which humanity is not against nature but a part of it. This relational anthropology affirms that Creation is good, that the diversity of life is intentional, and that humans have an obligation to act responsibly toward the earth. Bill McKibbon once remarked that “the environment is not only a spiritual issue but the spiritual issue of our time...It is (therefore) important just now to get our spiritual bearings, to get in touch with what fundamentally matters to us in living...to discover a thread connecting us to the rest of nature and life.” Interpretations which extend and embrace McKibbon’s idea of an encompassing reality have inspired many people to take a closer look at the ecological impact their behavior has had

on the life of the Universe as they seek to understand and actualize the sense of an unbroken web of interdependence that contains and sustains us all.

Any religious discussion which envisions God-in-relationship reflects the core of an ecological consciousness. Tangible signs of ecological living are evident in simplicity, connectivity, and intimacy, and possess the quality of reverence. But in order to cultivate the kind of behavior that would manifest ecological living, I believe a revolution in consciousness needs to accompany the findings of science in order for people to change their way of thinking about themselves and their world – a radical change of the heart (values) that would ultimately lead to changes in behavior. Transformation is at the heart of Christianity. "The Christians are called to transformation, to a personal experience of resurrected life, to a dynamic response of faith, and to a mission to all people," Wessels remarks.\textsuperscript{13} Out of an experience of the resurrected Christ a transformed community was born that moved from experience to faith, whose work and sense of identity came from their reinterpretation of the life of Jesus. Driven into their own experience of desert (persecution) and through temptation (renunciation of faith), the early Christians clarified their mission as one which (like Christ) would bring glad tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} Luke 4:14-21 in the \textit{New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)}. 

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John Dominic Crossan calls the historical role of Jesus “ethical eschatology” which he defines as: “Opposition to the world as it functions in any place or in any situation in which there is discrimination, violence, exploitation, oppression, injustice, or unrighteousness.”\(^{15}\) It urges us to act — to be the intervention of God. This calling arises from within people as a result of an inner change of heart and a new sense of a God of justice and righteousness for the whole Earth and all of its creatures. Giving priority to the poor and to challenging the political and religious climate of the day, “Jesus insisted that the world was full of possibilities for change and creativity,” says Witherton.\(^{16}\) Such transformation is an inner dynamic of the Universe — a symbol of new life, and the context from which the *Sermon on the Mount* emerges.

The *Sermon on the Mount* is a summary of the spiritual teachings of Jesus which is found in the Gospel of Matthew. In an interview with Bill Moyers, Sr. Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun, remarked that “The *Sermon on the Mount*, as far as I am concerned, is the most overlooked and underdeveloped aspect of Christian scripture — scripture which is a challenge to the heart and this moment — a call to public concern for a world that comes out of the mind and heart of God.”\(^{17}\) The roots of the *Sermon on the Mount* hold out the possibility for sacred


imagination to rethink religious perspective and may offer a way to reorient ourselves within the framework of nature as a whole. Some key ideas include:

- The *Sermon on the Mount* is a collection of principles intended to create a new attitude of mind that has little to do with outward things and everything to do with the growth of the soul.

- Participation in the eight blessings of the *Beatitudes*—service, humility, compassion, peace, simplicity, justice, courage, right-relatedness—manifest the qualities of a life lived in allegiance to God.

- The “Kingdom”—a “right now” and “not yet” phenomenon—is a world of intimacy, peace on earth and peace with the earth which makes evident our highest good.

- Metanoia, a slow process of transformation, is the key into the “Kingdom.”

Initial research seemed to reveal that the essence of the *Sermon on the Mount* shows you how to alter your life, if you really wish to change it. And, if you wish to be in vital relationship with another, it instructs in the process necessary to make true communion a reality. But a deeper examination of the *Beatitudes* was necessary to determine whether or not they reflect upon environmental issues. In an article for *Praying*, John Haught wrote that “Everything in nature is enfolded into God’s own compassionate experience. This way of thinking about the world should make a difference ecologically. For everything that happens in the world also happens to God. God is our ultimate environment.”18 These words suggest that an ecologically transformed life is a journey in which a

rediscovery of the sacred, an awareness of a deep and abiding love for all things, and a renewed understanding of creation are translated into actions which ultimately become the embodiment of hope for this planet and for ourselves. But can the principles that constitute the Beatitudes become legitimate stepping-stones for such a path as this? We shall see.

Through a methodology of secondary research supplemented by primary research, this dissertation was designed specifically to look for evidence of an ecological consciousness inherent in the biblical text, and whether or not applying the Beatitudes to ecological issues of our time is appropriate and beneficial. Secondary research included a literature review to gain insights, ideas, stir the imagination, and provide a starting point for this dissertation. As a foundation for this work, through books and articles I provide a comprehensive overview of modern ecological thought, the relationship of religion to the environment, and interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount. In addition, because research included asking analytical questions of the biblical text to determine the "why?" of its consequence on the environment, the methods used for biblical research were scientific exegesis and the theory of interpretation.

Primary research involved the use of personal interviews with Thomas Berry and Richard Rohr - experts in the fields of ecology, ethics, theology, and the Sermon on the Mount, as well as conversations with numerous people in communities that I visited during the period of research. In these open-ended interviews, questions explored and reflect vital thinking on the subjects of:
developing an ethical framework; ancient texts, language, and culture relevant to the Sermon on the Mount; and how an ecological consciousness is developed and practiced. Insights from the Berry and Rohr interviews are reflected throughout the dissertation. The stories collected through informal conversations are presented in Chapter Seven as anecdotes illustrating “beatitude living.” Although the people in these stories would never claim to be “beatitude people” themselves, (thus exemplifying the very humility that justifies using their lives to illustrate the beatitudes), I have identified them as such. The interviews provided clarification, guidance, and perspectives on whether the Beatitudes were an appropriate resource through which to reflect on ecological issues.

This dissertation unfolds as follows: Chapter Two is an in-depth exploration of the principles of ecology suggested by Barry Commoner in his book, Making Peace with the Planet. These principles include the laws of thermodynamics, an understanding of how life functions within ecosystems of community, and the consequences of ecologically mismatched behavior. Offered as a means of ensuring our survival, they urge us to learn to live according to the values of nature. Chapter Three, a critique of ecology, explores ecology’s interdisciplinary roots, and the effect that scientific thought has had on the discipline’s effectiveness at communicating ecological values. Chapter Four considers our eco-spiritual Christian heritage of environmental commentary, and how such ideas may be a legitimate means of teaching us the necessary skills and mental/spiritual attitude for building relationship with the Universe.
In order to determine whether or not the *Beatitudes* are an appropriate resource to apply to ecological issues, the intent of the biblical text must first be examined. This work is done in Chapter Five through an exegesis of the *Sermon on the Mount* which includes a discussion on the significance of its Aramaic roots and a parallel textual reading of various translations. Chapter Six follows with an interpretation of the *Beatitudes*. Chapter Seven compares the principles of ecology with the principles found in the *Beatitudes*, tracing the ecological threads from one through another. Chapter Eight concludes the dissertation with a determination as to whether the *Beatitudes* – the eight blessings of the *Sermon on the Mount* – can lead people to a new way of thinking about living – a new way of being that could induce a spiritual and behavioral paradigm shift sufficient to make a lasting and positive impact on the life of the universe.
CHAPTER TWO:

PRINCIPLES OF ECOLOGY

Introduction

Ecology, from the Greek work "oikos" meaning house or home, is the science that studies the function of communities of life within ecosystems. Says Carroll:

"The science of ecology is the study of organisms, including ourselves, "at home." It is the study of the very structure and function of nature itself (including ourselves), of natural process, of the fabric, the pattern, of life in the cosmos, the organic and the inorganic combined...And it accepts as reality that individual organisms (again including ourselves) not only adapt to the physical environment but, by their concerted action in ecosystems, also adapt the geochemical (physical) environment to their biological needs." 19

Science has determined that ecosystems consist of individual strands woven into an ever-broadening "whole," where all things are bound by an affirmation of relationship. Such relationships are very complex, and every part of them, including humankind, is dependent on every other part if they are to maintain the balance of nature that allows us all to survive. As Wilhelm describes it, "The principle of communion assures all things, all beings, that each

has a place and a role to play in the community of life. Nothing is ever created in isolation from the rest of reality. In other words, the earth is a fabric with no irrelevant threads. But as humans look out at the vast universe around us and try to understand our place in it, for the most part we have not learned the lessons of the earth. Maintaining the integrity of nature (including ourselves) is often what humanity has not done, sometimes through carelessness, often because it did not know better, and sometimes, sadly, because it was too much trouble.

We live in a time like no other in the history of the Universe. After almost four billion years of evolution, a single species, Homo sapiens, has evolved with its particularly unique capacity of contemplation. With it, we have been able to reconstruct the history of the earth and speculate on the complex processes that led to the early appearance of life and the forces that shaped its subsequent evolution. We have developed the ability to extend knowledge and experience from generation to generation, stimulating the imaginations of our fellow humans. The possibilities for good within the workings of the human mind would dance unimpeded toward actualization if it were not for that same human thinking being largely misled, sometimes, by our egocentric tendency to insist, as T.S. Elliot might have said, that we “turn the wheel on which we turn,” that through the power of our thoughts we can control the destiny of other species as well as our own. And so, although our reflective gifts are often used in the service of all life,

we also developed an undeniable and not always positive capacity to transform the earth for our own benefit. Divorced from the skills necessary to predict, with any certainty, the ecological consequences of our actions, more than a few scientists and other respected thinkers in the global community have determined our unique gift as that which has led the human species in general to lose sight of its place as one of many, many other members of and within an integral Universe. They tell us that losing our sense of place affects life in profound ways.

Consider this example: in 1992, some 1,575 of the world's senior scientists from 70 countries (including 99 of the 196 living scientists who are Nobel laureates), signed and sent an urgent warning to government leaders of all nations. According to this warning:

Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at serious risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring about.21

Also, in 1992, the Royal Society of London and the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, two of the world’s leading scientific organizations, issued a joint report, their first ever, which began:

If current predictions of population growth prove accurate and patterns of human activity on the planet remain unchanged, science and technology may not be able to prevent either irreversible degradation of the environment or continued poverty for much of the world...Sustainable development can be achieved, but only if irreversible degradation of the environment can be halted in time.\textsuperscript{22}

These warnings are not the views of a small number of scientists, but rather the consensus of the mainstream scientific community, consisting of most of the world's key researchers on environmental problems. Since the time these were issued, there have been others making similar statements. Thomas Berry has commented to the human species that our "error has been to think that we could distort the natural processes from some immediate human benefit without incurring immense penalties, penalties that might eventually endanger the well-being of the human as well as that of most other life forms."\textsuperscript{23} And in his October 2004 lecture at Sweet Briar College, E.O. Wilson called for us to recognize the present time as the "Century of the Environment" – where we must learn to settle down and enjoy the planet before we wreck it. These and other similar ideas continue to reach sympathetic ears in ever widening audiences, calling people to atone for unchecked fulfillment of desires that have deteriorated the world in ways we are only beginning to understand. Such dire predictions for the global community and stern reprimands toward the human species would lead any feeling person to wonder, what kind of state is the world really in? Although any answer and its supporting ideas may depend upon just who it is that is asking the


question, it is nevertheless one that we would do well to consider. Bjorn Lomborg, author of the controversial book *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, correctly determined the gravity of the question when he said, "Getting the state of the world right is important because it defines humanity’s problems and shows us where our actions are most needed. At the same time, it is also a scorecard for our civilization – have we done well with our abilities, and is this a world we want to leave for our children?"24

But, as can be expected, experts disagree about what our environmental problems are and what we should do about them. Conflicts arise mostly from differing ideas of how people think the world works, what they think their role in the world should be, and what they believe is right and wrong environmental behavior. Most people in today’s industrial-consumer society believe that their worldview is the primary driving force behind the major improvements in the human condition since the beginning of the industrial revolution about 275 years ago. Their basic environmental beliefs are that we are in charge of nature, that there is always more, all economic growth is good and the potential for global economic growth is unlimited, and our success depends upon how well we can understand, control, and manage the earth’s life support systems for our benefit. This first group accuses other scientists and environmentalists of exaggerating the seriousness of the problems we face, and failing to appreciate the progress we have made in improving quality of life and protecting the environment. For

example, in an article for the *Economist* entitled “The Truth about the Environment,”²⁵ Lomborg challenges what he has determined are the four big environmental fears: limited natural resources, lack of food for a burgeoning population, extinction of species, and growing pollution. Insisting that “the evidence does not back up this litany,” Lomborg’s analysis finds instead that the limit on natural resource availability lies in the expense of finding them, not their scarcity; population has peaked and food production has increased, species extinction – though real – is greatly exaggerated; and finally, with wealth comes the ability to care about the environment. In developed countries, air and water pollution has been significantly reduced.

In contrast, another worldview believes quite the opposite. They contend we are disrupting the earth’s life-support system for us and other forms of life at an accelerating rate, which, if kept up, could lead to serious environmental and economic harm. They are greatly encouraged by the progress we have made in increasing average life expectancy, reducing infant mortality, increasing food supplies, and reducing many forms of pollution. But since they assume that the “earth is a one-time endowment” they continue to focus on what more we need to do to help make the earth more sustainable for present and future human generations, and for the other species that support us and other forms of life.

It is and has always been part of the human condition that people with widely differing environmental beliefs can take the same data, be logically

consistent, and arrive at quite different conclusions because they start with different assumptions or beliefs. Says Carroll, "We are all biased, prejudiced, conditioned (and very much conditioned indeed) by our lives, our experiences, our inheritance, our proneness toward a certain world-view, and we are significantly less objective than we like to think we are, almost no matter how hard we try to be otherwise."\(^{26}\) That is why some scientists can believe that human ingenuity and technological advances will allow us to clean up pollution to acceptable levels, find substitutes for any resources that become scarce, and keep expanding the earth's ability to support more humans as we have done in the past, and others cannot. I propose that the most useful answer to whether or not things are getting better or worse is both. Some things are getting better and some are getting worse. It is a challenge not to get trapped into confusion and inaction by listening to what Tom Alden calls the "great political dichotomies:"\(^{27}\) either technological optimists – who overstate the situation by telling us not to worry at all because technological innovations and conventional economic growth will lead to a garden of Eden for everyone – or environmental pessimists – who overstate the problems to the point where our environmental situation seems hopeless. Much is lost when we see others as the enemy, and by feeling certain we are right. Empty rhetoric on either side serves no good purpose.

Aldo Leopold, one of the founders of the conservation and environmental movements of the 20th century, whose book, *A Sand County Almanac*, is


considered an environmental classic, once said he had no hope for a conservation based on fear. Neither do I. Instead, I believe, as E.O. Wilson commented, that the direction the human species will ultimately take will be an ethical one. We will save the world because it is the right thing to do, and the noble thing for our species to accomplish. Charles Darwin wrote, "No thinking or feeling person can deny either nature's grandeur or the depth and dignity of our discovery that a history of evolution binds all living creatures together." Human lives are always lives of choice, but I am inclined to believe that thinking and feeling people will realize that diminishing other species diminishes our own; that as living parts of the Earth we cannot harm the planet without hurting ourselves. We must learn to love, as W.H. Auden put it. But human evolution toward a genuinely new understanding of our place in the Universe requires a profound metamorphosis. If we use our reflective capacity to challenge our assumptions—whether that be the right to alter the composition of the global atmosphere if it be for our own benefit, or what, if any, moral obligation we may think we have to preserve the diversity of life forms on earth, I think it is reasonable to hope that humankind will use their gift of thought to continually re-evaluate the rules by which we should live and be judged, and to do the work necessary to discern our proper place in the Universe. As we transcend our present ways in order that we may enter a new era in human-earth relations, we shall need to learn to live in a new reality where the old barriers to compassion are overcome.


Principles of Ecology

In 1962, biologist Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*\(^{30}\) which documented the pollution of air, water, and wildlife from pesticides such as DDT. This influential book helped broaden the concept of resource conservation to include preservation of the quality of water, air, soil, and wildlife. Many people mark Carson's "wake-up call" as the beginning of the modern environmental movement, in which growing numbers of citizens organized to demand that political leaders enact laws and adopt policies to address such concerns as pollution and environmental degradation. After Carson, between 1965 and 1970, the emerging science of ecology received widespread media attention as the popular writings of biologists such as Paul Ehrlich (*The Population Bomb*), Garrett Hardin (*The Tragedy of the Commons*), and Barry Commoner (*The Closing Circle*) awakened people to the interlocking relationships among population growth, resource use, and pollution, respectively.

In a follow-up book, *Making Peace with the Planet*,\(^{31}\) Barry Commoner describes the human species as a creation living in two worlds — one natural, one self-created — governed by two conflicting sets of principles. Like many biologists, Commoner claims that humanity's insistence on its right to operate in such a manner has initiated a global crisis: the impact that the self-created, or technosphere, world has had on the natural world has been so catastrophic, that the two worlds can no longer co-exist peacefully. As the human species

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carelessly altered the processes of the natural world, so now the natural world threatens humanity with the inability to provide for our needs at a most basic level. Commoner states that to make things right, to insure our survival, the human species must find the will and the means necessary to fit properly into the pre-existing system. In order to accomplish this task, we must abandon the laws of the technosphere, which have no interest in relating to their surroundings, and begin to live according to the principles of ecology, according to the values of the pre-existing system called nature. As one way to learn to live in a new era of human-earth relations, Commoner proposes that the human species understand, adopt and actualize the following ecological principles:

Everything is connected to everything else.  
Everything has to go somewhere 
Nature knows best  
There is no such thing as a free lunch.

**Principle One: Everything is connected to everything else**

As humans have always tended to be egocentric, assigning ourselves a far larger and more central role than we deserve it has been suggested that the ecological crisis is a crisis of citizenship, which Kemmis defines as the failure of “we the people” to take moral responsibility for our worlds, to take seriously the particular places in which we live, and to see how we are embedded in a local ecosystem.\(^{32}\) Morally accountable to the community as a whole, if we are not

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conscious of ourselves as citizens, we will lose the idea of ecology itself.

Wilhelm adds:

The eco-crisis, therefore, is in reality one of origin, a distorted worldview rooted in the sins of pride, exaggerated self-importance, and greed plus broken relationships to earth, creation, and its Creator. Today, most humans have forgotten that they are earthlings, born of earth, reared and nurtured by its life-support systems and henceforth to return to it. Humankind has so divorced itself from this earthly bond that few ever ask the critical questions surrounding true identity and genesis. Who am I? Where did I come from? How did I get here? Why am I here? What should I do? Where am I going and when? 33

The current pattern of exploiting energy resources and destroying the natural environment stems from a naïve wishful thinking that we are somehow above the laws of the Universe. Yet this fact remains: we are a small part of a very large universe, subject to the same laws of physics, chemistry, biology, and ecology that shape the rest of the natural world. We can neither create perpetual motion machines nor obtain inexhaustible supplies of energy merely for our asking.

*The Earth Charter,* 34 an international declaration of global interdependence and universal responsibility, recognizes that none of the fundamental problems that face our world can be addressed in isolation. Approved at UNESCO headquarters in Paris in March 2000, this declaration was crafted in response to a growing planetary need to address the national and international interdependence of the Earth community. It states that as we have

entered an era of global history none of the problems that face our world can be addressed in isolation. It seeks to establish a shared vision of basic values that will provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. At the heart of this vision is an ethic which recognizes that the human species is a part of all life forms and the greater community of life. All other principles flow from an ethic of respect and care articulated in the Charter’s first two principles which call us to “Respect Earth and life in all its diversity” and “Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion and love.”

Understanding that at this time in the course of history, cultivating a sense of connection within the human family and the greater community of life, in all its diversity, is essential, the declaration concludes that only such an expansion of our moral consciousness will transform the industrial-technological civilization and lead toward a genuinely sustainable way of life. The poet, Gary Lawless, says it this way:

If you want to speak for trees, you have to learn the language of interaction because one of the ways the tree is going to speak to you is in the way that it interacts with everything else within the community. If you deny some of those interactions, then it’s a lot easier to get rid of the trees...because you’re not really understanding the language of the tree. You’re not learning about the whole conversation.35

Lawless’ remarks echo the words of Thomas Berry who asserts that we need to reassign ourselves to our proper place and points the way to a vision of a new earth wherein we experience solidarity with all of life, calling us to reinvent

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the human species as part of the community of all life systems. Through intimacy with the planet and into wonder and beauty and the full depth of meaning, Berry says that we will find what “enables an integral human relationship with the planet to function. It is the only possibility for humans to attain their true flourishing while honoring the other modes of being. The fulfillment of the Earth community is to be caught up on the grandeur of existence itself and in the admiration of those mysterious powers whence all this has emerged.”

Intimacy allows us to recognize that the well being of those with whom we share this planet — and the planet itself — is also our own and invites us to become co-creators of the world with the Divine Will — a presence as immediate as our own bodies. The first principle insists that every individual of every species at every level of existence has significance for the whole, and bonds together all parts of the process of creation into one unity. Says Forbes, “Creation is a living process, resulting in a living universe in which a kinship exists between all things. Thus the Creators are our family, our Grandparents or Parents, and all of their creations are children who, of necessity, are also our relations.”

This first principle insists on connection and experiential knowledge of all that is around us. It cultivates a sense of reverence. It forges an emotional bond — love — between us and nature which allows an equal right for all to live. Love — as in “love thy neighbor” or “biophilia”: the connections that human beings subconsciously seek with the rest of life, is the grounding for the

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principle of communion – the very core of an ecological consciousness. Love makes a place for everything.

**Principle Two: Everything Must Go Somewhere: The laws of thermodynamics**

Populations of different organisms that live together and interact with each other create a community. Its structure is roughly analogous to a household. An ecosystem consists of the community plus the environment; and the relationships within the ecosystem – the flow of energy and the interactions of various species – are described as its ecology. But, if we are ever to understand the nature of the world, we must learn more about the behavior of energy. **Principle two recognizes the science of energy transformations, or thermodynamics, and describes the few simple laws that govern the behavior of all energy, regardless of its form.** Energy exists in a variety of forms at different levels, and it ebbs and flows in countless directions throughout the universe. Moreover, energy can be trapped or stored, and released to do something at some later time, and converted from one form to another. Heat, motion, light, electricity, and the forces holding atoms together in molecules are all different forms of the same capacity to cause change. In short, energy is best understood as the ability to do work.

According to the first law of thermodynamics, energy can be changed from one form to another, but it cannot be created or destroyed. The total energy of any system plus its surroundings thus remains constant despite any changes. This means that the energy released as a boulder topples down a hill must be
directly proportional to the amount of energy exerted to get it up the hill in the first place. It also means that the energy that is “lost” as the heat of friction is not actually lost; it is merely unavailable for use in that system. In addition, the first law of thermodynamics states that energy can be stored in various forms and then changed into other forms. For example, in automobile engines, the energy stored in the chemical bonds of gasoline is converted to heat, which is then partially converted to mechanical movement (kinetic energy). Some of the energy is then converted back to heat by the friction of these movements and some of it leaves the engine in the exhaust products. Or, take for another example the firefly which converts chemical energy to kinetic energy, to flashes of light, and to electrical impulses that travel along the nerves of its body. In these energy conversions, and in all others, the total energy of a system and its surroundings after the conversion is equal to the total energy before the conversion. No matter how hard we try, we cannot get something for nothing – we cannot get more energy out of a system than we put in. Because the first law of thermodynamics tells us that energy can be neither created nor destroyed, it may be tempting to think we will always have enough energy. But something is lost if, for example, we were to fill a car’s tank with gasoline and drive it around until the engine stopped. What is lost is energy quality.

In any energy transformation, some useful energy is always degraded to lower quality, more dispersed, less useful energy. This degraded energy usually takes the form of heat given off to the environment. There it is dispersed by the random motion of air or water molecules and becomes even more disorderly and
less useful. This is the second law of thermodynamics — the law of entropy wherein a thing once used becomes less useful. Here is how it works. In a gasoline engine, about 25% of the energy originally present in the fuel is converted into mechanical energy (to power the vehicle) and electrical energy (to run its electrical system). The remaining 75% is transformed into the environment in the form of heat. Energy dissipated as heat has not been destroyed, but it has been lost for all practical purposes. Heat is simply the random motion of atoms and molecules. It is no longer available to do useful work. And that is true not because it is difficult for us to re-convert it into useful energy. It is that we cannot do so, for the energy is qualitatively different. In short, this law says that in any energy conversion, we always end up with less usable energy than we started with. Life is only a circle up to a certain point. So, not only can we not get something for nothing, in terms of energy quality, we cannot even break even, in terms of energy quality. Entropy is a measure of disorder, and all processes act so as to increase entropy. This means that a system becomes increasingly disorganized as its available energy decreases. Any organism must expend energy simply to remain organized. And since life can only continue in highly organized states and our environment is essentially disruptive, living systems must have both a source of energy and some efficient means of converting it from one form to another. With a little imagination, you can see that these energy laws have some very interesting implications for living systems.
In his essay "Entropy,"38 Herman Greene simplifies some of the most famous speculations given to the law of entropy. The first one forecasts the coming "heat death" of the universe. According to this view, it is thought that the inexorable workings of the law of entropy will result in the dispersal of all energy in a disorderly fashion throughout the cosmos, assuring that the world will cease to exist. Another popular meaning given to the law of entropy is that, looking only at the earth, the progressive increase of entropy will inevitably lead to the exhaustion of the Earth's resources. The clear message here is that we should not squander our scarce resources. Rather, we should conserve them to prolong life on Earth. In this view, technology is criticized as a force that is rapidly and exponentially accelerating the increase in entropy in the Earth's systems. Finally, some people think that the law of entropy introduces the concept of an "arrow of time." In this view, the flow of time from past to present to future can be accounted for as a function of entropy. As such, our experience of time is an interior awareness of the progressive increase in the Universe's entropy. Hence, entropy is what makes time, time.

But perhaps it is the aspect of "qualitative change" that defines the law of entropy which holds the greatest implication for the Universe. According to Greene, exponents of this view have extended the meaning of entropy from responsibility for time, to that of accounting for evolution. Like entropy, evolution involves qualitative change in the Universe. Thus, states of matter can come into being that are different from what preceded them, and hence, the progression

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from "big bang" to life in its various forms, to the human. Evolution means that what is now is not the same as it was. It is qualitatively different.

The Universe is a place where new and different and amazing things keep happening: a place of self-organizing spontaneous creativity, which was not created as a finished product – but as a beginning, a hope. The Universe Story is, after all, a creation story. It tells how we got here, where we belong, and the relationship that is between all things. If, as it seems to be, all creative activity in the Universe involves expenditure of energy, perhaps this can be a sign for us that the qualitatively new is possible even now, in a creative process we are trying to invoke for the sake of this lifetime. Perhaps it can be the beginning of hope that our positive actions may yet make a difference for good in the life we have been given.

**Principle Three: Nature knows best**

*Principle three confirms that the ecosystem is consistent with itself.*

That means that the living things of the natural world are produced and exist in accordance with how they fit into the pre-existing system. The limited but self-consistent substances that nature has created over its lifetime are essential to life. If undisturbed, mature natural ecosystems remain the same size and need the same amount of energy each year. They are stable in the sense that they perpetuate themselves and require little, if any additional materials each year. The sizes and varieties of populations are held in check by the interactions between the species, such as competition and predation. The amount of energy
that enters and the amount of matter that cycles are appropriate to support these populations. Packard and Reinhardt explain this process by considering the "greenhouse effect." Greenhouse gases have a bad reputation these days, but they've been warming the earth's climate for hundreds of millions of years. Without them, the earth's surface would be too cold to support life as we know it. The earth receives a tremendous amount of energy from the sun — a few days worth of sunshine is equal to the amount of energy stored in all of the planet's fossil fuels. About 30% of solar radiation is reflected back into space; the rest is absorbed by oceans, land surfaces, clouds, and atmospheric gases, which then emit that energy in the form of thermal radiation. Naturally occurring greenhouse gases, especially water vapor and carbon dioxide, trap some of the thermal radiation and redirect it toward the earth's surface, insulating the earth like a blanket.

But the atmospheric concentrations of certain greenhouse gases have increased significantly over the past century, and much of the increase is directly related to human-impacted ecosystems. Unlike more natural systems, human-impacted ecosystems essentially have two added parts: the country, where agriculture and animal husbandry are found, and the city/suburbs, where most people live. This representation of human-impacted ecosystems, although simplified, allows us to see that these systems require two major inputs: fuel energy and raw materials (e.g. metals, woods, synthetic materials). The use of

these necessarily results in waste and pollution as outputs. Although carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, such as methane, are natural phenomena, human activity contributes significantly to the release of those gases into the atmosphere. In human-impacted ecosystems, carbon dioxide comes from activities that involve fuel combustion by-products, sewage, fertilizers, pesticides, and solid waste. All these are added to the environment in the hope that natural cycles will cleanse the biosphere of these pollutants. But we have exploited natural ecosystems to the extent that the environment is overloaded. And more and more natural ecosystems are impacted, because an ever-increasing number of people want to maintain a standard of living that requires many goods and services. The relentless process of change and variation, of production and waste introduced and perpetuated by the technosphere is unnatural. Ecosystems suffer when they cannot readjust themselves quickly enough to keep pace.

The introduction to this chapter discussed how many people believe that the environment is indestructible. To them, the earth is so big and encompassing that our “normal” economic activity will not harm it. They scorn negative environmental reports, insisting that stricter environmental regulations are unnecessary and will hamper economic growth. But still, this fact remains: environmental degradation is found everywhere, regardless of the economic system. What if our prodigal waste is catching up to us? What if our land has reached a stage of crisis? What if some earth systems have managed to survive only because humans have lacked the power to destroy it? Much of our
environmental problems are characterized by uncertainties, but as with any other risk, uncertainty is no excuse for inaction. Over the years we have seen the human species pollute the farthest reaches of the globe. Even if such devastating consequences do occur only a fraction of the time, they clearly illustrate that the intervention of the government is only as good as the people involved, and enlightened self-interest only goes so far. With no inherent mechanism in society for protecting the earth community, an ethical foundation must be established for environmental protection or it will be sacrificed to short-term economic interest. Forbes wonders:

When a mountain is to be pulled down to produce cement, or coal, or cinderstone, or to provide housing for expanding suburbs, the questions that must be asked are not only those relating to stream-flow, future mudslides, fire danger, loss of animal habitat, air pollution, or damage to stream water quality. Of paramount importance are also questions of beauty, ownership, and the unequal allocation of wealth and power that allows rich investors to make decisions affecting large numbers of creatures based only upon narrow self-interest. Still more difficult are questions relating to the sacredness of Mother Earth and of the rights of mountains to exist without being mutilated. When do humans have the right to mutilate a mountain?40

It seems that the biggest need is for ordinary people to learn something about ecology and then to decide whether enough citizens want to participate in action that supports the environment or not. The success of this third principle depends upon humanity living in harmony with the rest of nature, not conquering it. The creation of and context for such an ethical foundation is the self-reflective task of the fourth principle.

Principle Four  There is no such thing as a free lunch

The fourth principle concerns itself with the consequence of failure. The fact that we have an environmental crisis is because the world of the technosphere and the natural world are ecologically mismatched. In other words, when what is introduced to the pre-existing system of nature is compatible with it, the living things of the biosphere adjust accordingly and in such a manner as to perpetuate life. When a harmful substance is introduced into the conservative, self-consistent, and cyclical world of nature, unavoidable harmful effects result.

What has gone wrong, very simply, is that humankind has worked very hard to control nature, but has forgotten that it is also a part of nature. We have followed the advice of Genesis: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”41 We have multiplied tremendously; we have believed that we do indeed “have dominion...over every living thing.” But we have forgotten an equally important verse: “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth the beast; even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast; for all is vanity.”42 It was a mistake for us to believe that we could control nature. We can only change it – and, almost without

42 Ecclesiastes 3:19, NRSV.
exception, the changes we have wrought have been for the worse. Our interference has often devastated lands, poisoned waters and air, and deteriorated our environment. We have been working against the rest of the earth community, not with it.

Living by the ideal of reverence for life means to take full responsibility for how we live as well as taking action in our lives. But there is a crisis in human nature: we are innately selfish and short-sighted and hampered by ignorance of God. Our selfishness is at the root of the sin and injustice which characterize human society. Says McFague, "We are dealing with a wily, crafty enemy – ourselves – as the perpetrators of the ecocrisis. The moral issue of our day – and the vocation to which we are called – is whether we and other species will live and, if so, how well. For it is not enough to change our lifestyle; we must change what we value." When it comes to caring for the environment, this same ignorance and greed becomes evident. Creation, like justice and peace, has fallen prey to our imperfect natures, as humans throughout history have abused the created in pursuit of resources and a better life. Our environmental difficulties are outward manifestations of a crisis of mind and spirit – one ultimately concerned with the kind of creatures we are and what we must become in order to survive.

We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move

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forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of culture and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of the Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.44

So begins the preamble of *The Earth Charter* that bridges continents, cultures, and faiths in recognition that our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected. This historical document is the creation of thousands of people all over the globe that focuses attention on the critical ecological and social challenges and choices facing humanity. Naming the challenge to maintain the integrity of the Universe as an ethical one, it states that if we are to make the great transition to a just, sustainable, and peaceful world we must reconstruct our ideas of the “good life” and our understanding of right conduct as individuals, institutions, and nations and choose a better way. We have the responsibility to examine critically and to promote the realization of our most promising ecological and social ideals, for even though we may not be able to realize our highest ideals fully, the vision of them is essential.

In a similar way, Thomas Berry’s book, *The Great Work*, calls humankind to account for where we have been as a species in relationship to the Universe, what we have done, and where we are going. “Human presence on the planet Earth in the opening years of the twenty-first century is the subject of this book.

44 *Earth Charter* – preamble.
We need to understand where we are and how we got there. Once we are clear on these issues, we can move forward with our historical destiny, to create a mutually enhancing mode of human dwelling on the planet Earth.\textsuperscript{45} This “mutually enhancing mode of human dwelling” is our Great Work, a vision of human solidarity and kinship with all of life grounded in a collective sense of reverence for Mystery and in deep humility regarding our place in the Universe. When we affirm the unity of nature and spirit, that the Earth’s soul is our own, only then can we become life-giving participants in the regeneration of the world.

However, in order to teach others this truth of the Universe, we must first teach ourselves. Who we say we are must be aligned with how we act – right now. In other words, we can only support the integrity of the Universe by doing what we believe is right for the community of life - regardless of how we may feel others will judge us. To promote integrity we must first live it - it may even be considered our personal “Great Work.” To move within the integrity of the Universe we must live bounded to others and understand that we are responsible to and for everyone and everything else. We must maintain an air of idealism rather than succumb to a philosophy of realism. Wilson says:

The stewardship of environment is a domain on the near side of metaphysics where all reflective persons can surely find common ground. For what, in the final analysis, is morality but the command of conscience seasoned by a rational examination of consequences? And what is a fundamental precept but one that serves all generations? An enduring

\textsuperscript{45} Berry, \textit{The Great Work}, ix.
environmental ethic will aim to preserve not only the health and freedom of our species, but access to the world in which the human spirit was born.\textsuperscript{46}

It seems to me that we can help guide creation into a better world if our own lives are lived in allegiance to the Universe. The ethical imperative for this fourth principle should therefore be, first of all, prudence. Every action will be judged in terms of its consequence, and as we learn to live as members in the natural world, we may come to understand what it means to be human in the processes of the ecosphere, eventually participating in the reweaving of the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us.

\textsuperscript{46}Wilson, \textit{Diversity of Life}, 351.
CHAPTER THREE:

CRITIQUE OF ECOLOGY

Introduction

It has been said that we live in an Age of Science, that a culture of science is a part of, and perhaps the basis for, our whole contemporary human culture. And, while few people consciously participate in it, the roots of this culture go deep into common-sense methods of thought, analysis, and experiment that people have used for untold generations to make sense out of their world and to run their lives well. The word science is derived from a Latin verb meaning "to know." Therefore, science is a way of knowing. It emerges from our curiosity about the world, the universe, and us.

Human life in modern times is largely occupied with acquiring knowledge, both from formal education and daily experiences. Striving to understand seems to be one of our basic drives – mostly because we are alive and want to better understand what that means. To know something is to believe it and to have a reason for believing it. One of the most essential activities that a living organism must do to understand things (and sometimes to survive) is to gather information about the world around it.
New scientific ideas have appeared throughout humankind’s history. Many of these ideas have been erroneous, of course, but they often provided at least a framework for the expansion of our knowledge. One such framework for knowing about the world that has proved remarkably fertile is through the discipline called Ecology: the science that studies the function of communities of life within ecosystems. Recent interest in ecology is convincing more and more people of our dilemma: earth’s life support systems – those that provide our clean air, fresh water, regulate our climate, and provide us with wonder and inspiration are being degraded; we have a burgeoning population and some resources are growing scarce; we must increase our awareness of the intense interaction between ecology and politics; and we need to decide what methods to employ in regaining or maintaining a good environment. Says Sanders:

It’s plain to many people that the Earth cannot support for much longer the extravagant way of life so common in rich countries, nor can it support the spreading of that extravagance to poor countries. Sooner or later we’ll burn up all the cheap oil, we’ll pump the aquifers dry, we’ll cut down the last big trees, we’ll fish the oceans bare, we’ll plow up the last arable land and taint the last clean air. The life of endless consumption is ruinous to the planet and bound to fail... the question isn’t whether it will fail, but when and how the end of our spree will come.\textsuperscript{47}

For most people, that the earth is in some form of crisis has been established. One could imagine that, knowing all we do about the influence of the human species on the state of the environment, people would be moved to act offensively, in support of healing the earth. But scientific facts have so far not been enough of an impetus to alter the lifestyles, demands, needs, and actions of

humanity as they pertain to the limits of the earth, for life on this planet continues
to be negatively impacted by some of the ideas and behaviors of humans. But
before we can look for solutions, we have to find out why this is so. This chapter
will offer a critique of Ecology, specifically addressing the limitations of the
discipline in current thought and praxis, and explore why the way in which
ecological principles are being communicated to the public does not affect an
appreciable change in human behavior: a change that would benefit the whole
earth community.

An Ecological Critique

Ecological thinking is different from most thinking that guides modern society. Chapter Two provided an in-depth look at the key maxims of an ecological consciousness, the principles of ecology, derived from the laws of conservation and matter, the laws of energy or thermodynamics, and the workings of ecosystems. To reiterate, these four principles may be expressed as:

Everything is connected to everything else.
Everything has to go somewhere
Nature knows best
There is no such thing as a free lunch.48

There are some who claim that every schoolchild and every adult should learn these simple truths which concern the workings of the communities of life

48 Commoner, Making Peace With the Planet.
and a respect for all that is a part of it. Says Orr, “I suggest that at all levels of learning K through PhD, some part of the curriculum be given to the study of natural systems roughly in the manner in which we experience them.”

Integral to an ecological consciousness is a proper understanding of the world, requiring people to learn how to think and live holistically, systematically, and futuristically. Learning about and adhering to these maxims, suggests Forbes, “would not only enable people to address questions relating to stream-flow, fire danger, and damage to stream water quality, but also those concerned with beauty, ownership, and the rights of mountains to exist without being mutilated.”

Once aligned with these principles, we can move forward with our historical destiny, “to create a mutually enhancing mode of human dwelling on the planet Earth,” Berry says. In many ways these principles are simply common sense: they outline a framework for living that, on the surface, few would find reason to quarrel with. One has to wonder why, then, given the predicament of our world, these principles are routinely violated in contemporary thinking and praxis.

At a recent lecture concerning the environment, participants were invited to try a “thought experiment” initially used by Dr. Lester Milbrath in his work to assist people in identifying their beliefs, attitudes, and values concerning the

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51 Berry, *The Great Work*, ix.
environment.\textsuperscript{52} We were asked to imagine that, suddenly, all the humans disappeared, but all the artifacts of modern civilization—were left behind. The world still had shopping malls, automobiles, factories, buildings and roads, but no people. What then? The answer was that after a few hundred years, buildings would crumble, vehicles would have fallen apart by rust; gradually, water, soil, and air would clean up; plants would have recolonized the roads, fields, and parking lots; and some species which struggle now would flourish once more. In other words, nature would thrive without us.

This experiment was intended to open up the possibility that people are generally misinformed with respect to the environmental issues of our time. We are conditioned to assume that what needs to be fixed lies outside the human. But the exercise invited participants to consider an alternative to that conviction. Suppose that fundamental to confronting and resolving these issues is the realization that we do not have an environmental crisis, per se. Suppose what we have, instead, is a crisis of civilization. The problems in the environment, explored in Chapter Two, include: a rising world human population, resource depletion, waste generation and discharge beyond the earth’s capacity to handle, and negative climate and ozone change. Says Berry, “The Earth cannot sustain our present industrial system based on the plundering of the Earth’s resources.

\textsuperscript{52} Dr. Lester Milbrath is a distinguished scholar, whose research as focused on the relationships among science, society, and citizen participation in environmental policy decisions. He is the author of numerous articles and books including \textit{Envisioning a Sustainable Society} (1989), and \textit{Think Environmentally While There Is Still Time} (1995).
The impact of our present technologies is beyond what the Earth can endure. But Dr. Milbrath’s exercise illustrates that, in fact, these kinds of problems that press on and about us, are not first and foremost problems of the environment. Rather, they have to do with problems that lie within ourselves, within the human species. Bakhnova and Shafarenko say that “the global crisis is a crisis of priorities, values, and of individual consciousness. In the time of the industrial influence on nature, and the dramatic increase of the population of our planet, it is necessary to radically change our attitudes towards the environment.”

Pollard adds, “There is a most delicate balance of gravity, heat, and light realized on the earth but only rarely on the other planets, making the earth a rare gem of fantastic beauty whose desecration by any being is an act of awful sacrilege against which the heart of all meaning and purpose in the universe must cry out in anguish. An appreciation of all this is essential to man’s continued occupation of this planet.” Chapter Two determined that if the maxims of ecology, which espouse communion, humility, and reverence within the community of life, were a lived reality, much of our tendency to cause harm to our home in the Universe, and to species within our earth community, would significantly diminish. We would come to see ourselves, in Berman’s words, as “participants in the drama of

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the cosmos, and know it to be a place of belonging." But any inclination to identify with our surroundings that we may have once had generally seems to have passed away from us. And so, without intending to, we have created a civilization that appears to be headed for trouble.

Those who believe that we are on such a path often concur that present day society is not capable of producing a solution because it is disabled by the values our leaders constantly support: economic growth, consumption, competitiveness, power, and domination: values that much of the lifestyles of the West identify with, also, even if they don’t know it. They feel that societies pursuing these goals cannot avoid upsetting the systems of life. If this is true, then we have no choice but to change, yet change is what we consistently resist. Humans cannot seem to love the earth as it deserves, to celebrate their place within it, and to take great pains not to desecrate it. Over the last few years, many concerned people have begun to wonder aloud, “How did we get to such a time as this?” The “how” of our arrival to this particular moment in human-earth relations is the sort of inquiry that we in the West have become quite accustomed to asking and discerning – indeed it has been the question at the heart of science for a very long time. Typically, research shows that over the last few hundred years, a great shift in human-earth relations has occurred. The many who have studied this shift, which is concurrent with the development of modern science,

mark its commencement in the sixteenth century, with the beginning of the Scientific Revolution.

The Scientific Revolution began as a reaction against a medieval Aristotelian model of scientific explanation which stressed the internal, essential nature of physical objects (glass is brittle), and the final causes connected with this internal nature (which means it breaks). To many of that time, such a circular explanation (i.e. action explained by internal nature, internal nature described in terms of action) served no useful explanatory function. Instead, it was seen that only some of the external properties of an object can truly objectively characterize the object, and be used to explain its other external properties as well. To these particular thinkers, objective (primary) properties trumped internal (secondary) properties, and henceforth, the idea of internal nature was rejected as being of little consequence for knowing something.

The scientific revolution was initiated by Copernicus (1493-1593) – who postulated the separation of theory from observable phenomena. He was followed by Galileo (1564-42), responsible for “the separation of physical science from philosophy, the abandonment of authority as a criterion of scientific truth, the distinction between objective and subjective qualities in observable phenomena, and the introduction or reintroduction of empirical and skeptical elements into philosophical investigations;” Francis Bacon (1561-1626) – the father of the scientific method, who separated metaphysics as that which is concerned with final causes, and physics which was concerned with physical and efficient causes, i.e. cause and effect relationships based on the observed
regularities of nature; and Isaac Newton (1642-1727) — who established mechanistic science as the study of objects in motion where transformation in the phenomenal world was based on the laws of locomotion (absolute space and time, and no action at a distance), and in doing so relegated metaphysics and God to the beginnings of the cosmos. Finally, there was the phenomenon of the philosophical transformation led by Rene Descartes (1596-1650) — who separated human consciousness from the mechanistic natural world, and within the human, the mind and spirit from the body. 5^7

The fundamental discovery of the Scientific Revolution was that there is no real clash between rationalism (the laws of thought conform to the laws of things) and empiricism (always check your thoughts against the data so that you know what thoughts to think), and that each approach could be translated into a concrete tool for knowing. To illustrate, Descartes showed how mathematics was the most trustworthy knowledge available — the epitome of reason; Bacon used the scientific method to yield “yes” and “no” answers; and Galileo’s work combined the two to determine how falling objects behave. This marriage of mathematics and experiment expresses the significant shift in perspective: from circular to linear, from phenomena to matter, from a cosmological story, to a story of science. Says Berman, “The story of the modern epoch, at least on the level of mind, is one of progressive detachment. From the sixteenth century on, mind has been progressively expunged from the phenomenal world....Scientific

57 This summary is based on, and the quoted passage is taken from, essays appearing in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, McMillan, 1967.
consciousness is alienated consciousness: There is no ecstatic merger with nature, but rather total separation from it...I am not my experiences, and thus not really a part of the world around me.\textsuperscript{58}

If the goal of the Scientific Revolution was the elevation of inquiry as to how things occur, it has been realized. Positivism, the irrelevance of immeasurable phenomena, became the public face of modern science down to the present day. The realm of modern science deals with the events of the physical world. In short, its methodology is characterized by: a move towards a Platonic emphasis on the formal mathematical properties that lie beneath appearances, and away from an Aristotelian reliance on appearances or everyday observations; a tendency to explain all events in terms of the properties of extended matter and their external relationships; and a method of hypothesis and simplified experiment to discover the laws governing the properties of extended matter. The most legitimate criteria for valuing/determining worth now has to do with one’s ability to measure, observe, and make predictions of a thing. Consequently, as “how” became increasingly important, “why” became increasingly irrelevant.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this methodology of disconnection accompanied a transformed view of the basic nature of reality incompatible with the one which predominated in the West down to the eve of the Scientific Revolution. Whereas in an earlier time, according to Berman, many people once considered nature, 

\textsuperscript{58} Berman, 20.
"an enchanted world, wherein rocks, trees, rivers, and clouds were all seen as wondrous and alive, and human beings felt at home in this environment," their view of nature shifted to one of disenchantment. Modern science championed this transformed view of nature, in which "life" had been redefined as a complex type of organization of matter; "consciousness" was dismissed for being consistent with the internal nature of things; and "values" (good and bad, love and fear) and other secondary properties (like taste, color, and sound), were generally considered of little importance to the process of scientific inquiry, and so to life, itself. All of this was to have tremendous significance for the developing field of ecology, and, ultimately, ecology's ability to impact the kinds of life choices, and choices about life that people decide are worth their attention.

While its roots go back to 18th century natural history, modern ecology developed as a recognized discipline only during the first two decades of the 20th century. A movement, similar to that of modern science, is echoed through ecology's brief history as its emphasis shifted from anti-reductionist to reductionist: following the core themes of romanticism (imagination and emotion) to realism (measurable properties). Initially, ecology organized its perception of nature around the axiom that place constitutes community. Around the turn of the century, attention transferred to the processes within these communities. Ecologists then began to wonder if a given assembly of things is only the sum of individual organisms, or if it expressed, instead, a higher identity. Says Sachs,

\[59\] Ibid, 14.
\[60\] Armstrong and Botzler, eds. Environmental Ethics, 178.
“Up to the Second World War, the latter conception was clearly dominant: plant/animal societies were seen as super-organisms that evolve actively, adapting to their environment. In opting for organicism – the postulate that the whole is superior to its parts and an entity in its own right – the ecologists were able firmly to constitute the object of their science.”61

After the war, however, mechanistic conceptions of the world swept across disciplines. As ecology, like any science, was restructured along the lines of positivist methodology, an appreciation for place and community shifted to a search for the general laws of elements and their measurable relationships. The flow of energy, descriptive of both organic and inorganic worlds, was identified as the common denominator connecting individuals with their environment, and became the measurable property of elements and their relationships. As the science of community became the study of systems, the language of ecosystem became essential to understanding order in the world, and the West’s priority of knowledge based in community shifted to a knowledge based on distance. This adoption of systems thinking, and dominance-prone knowledge, marked the end of a journey from organisicism to scientific reductionism, from the notion of the “priority of the whole” to scientific discourse.

The implications of such a shift as it pertains to a perception of value for ecology in general, and the environment in particular, cannot be underestimated. True, it was during this time in the 60’s that for many people the concept of

ecosystem became the key to understanding order in the world. As a worldview uniting living, non-living, and human worlds, its inclusivity was powerful. For those who came to believe that the ecosystem (in praxis as well as in principle) was essential for the continuance of life, the idea of it came to evoke a sentiment of both responsibility and reverence. But the priority of the "ecosystem" as an encompassing reality in which humanity both depended on and participated in quickly became a priority of "ecosystem management," a systems theory aimed at increasing control over nature.62 And as the effects of environmental degradation became increasingly obvious, the combined dynamic of distance learning and systems theory opened the door of ecology to all sorts of strange and, some have said, inappropriate bed-fellows such as neo-classical economics,63 development,64 and resource management.

The same year (1989) that Time magazine declared the planet "Man of the Year,"65 the cover of the September issue of Scientific America showed a satellite image of America and Europe with the imperative "Managing Planet

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63 The basic assumption of neoclassical economics is that human beings are self-interested individuals drawn together to benefit each other (eventually) -often by fully exploiting natural resources. As long as the economy grows, individuals in a society will sooner or later participate in prosperity. For literature on the neoclassical economic model and the ecological economic model, see Robert Costanza, et. al, An Introduction to Ecological Economics, (Boca Raton, FL: St. Lucie Press, 1997); Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr. For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future, 2nd edition, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); and Lester R. Brown et al, State of the World Annual Reports. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984).

64 In this context, development is a metaphor which guided scientific thought for many years, evolved from a concept of change/evolution that moves toward an appropriate form of being, to a conception of change/evolution that moves toward an ever more perfect form. See Gustavo Esteva’s "Development" in The Development Diction ary, pp. 6-25; also Wolfgang Sachs. "The Archaeology of the Development Idea." Interculture. Volume 23, No 4, Fall 1990.

65 Time, January 02, 1989.
Earth." This image was accompanied by the title article in which it stated that, "Self-conscious, intelligent management of the earth is one of the great challenges facing humanity as it approaches the 21st century." Such rhetoric helped to reinforce the embrace of systems theory that had already begun to creep into people's minds. Humanity increasingly saw both their relationship to the earth and their life's vocation through the lens of modern scientific values: as legitimized controller of nature. As Western culture acquiesced their personal responsibility to create or discover solutions to the environmental problems in the world, science came to believe that it could and should find a way to govern nature's regulating mechanisms so as to manipulate the responsiveness of the system, thus solving nature's ills through objective, scientific means. Said Sachs, "Looking at nature in such a way amounts to completing Bacon's vision of dominating nature, albeit with the added pretension of regulating her revenge. In this way, ecosystem management turns finally against ecology. A movement which bade farewell to modernity ends up welcoming her, in new guise, through the backdoor." Decidedly divorced from any prior self-understanding as fundamentally rooted in communion, cosmology, and creativity, ecology – at one time both a scientific discipline as well as an all-embracing world view - had metamorphosed, nearly imperceptively to some, into an efficiency revolution – a cure-all for environmental ills. Environmental issues, and the principles of ecology capable of addressing them, were now being communicated through the

67 Sachs, Development Dictionary, 32.
framework of domination, competition, and power. As a consequence, for many people, from these moments onward, both ecological principles and environmental salvation were firmly planted into faith that the "proven means of modern economy – product innovation, technological progress, market regulation, and science based planning – will show the way out of our ecological predicament," according to Sachs.⁶⁸

For years, concerned scholars, whose voices cross every discipline, have been trying to convince the rest of the people that this just isn't so, and that, in fact, approaching the environment in such a manner has had measurable negative consequences for the planet and those who live on it, and will continue to do so. To illustrate, Brockelman has said, "By seeing nature simply as a backdrop and 'stuff' put here merely for our pleasure and endless economic exploitation and growth, we have brought upon ourselves and all of creation a vastly destructive ecological crisis in which we seem ultimately to be threatening not only our own lives, but those of myriad species around us;"⁶⁹ and Korten offers, "We have acquiesced to the rule of predatory global corporations, which are bound by law and structure to maximize financial return to faceless absentee owners without regard to the social and environmental consequences for life."⁷⁰ Berry has determined that, "Mechanistic science has to a great degree separated

⁶⁸ Sachs, Planet Dialectics, 38.
⁷⁰ David Korten, "From the Love of Money to the Love of Life," The Ecozoic Reader, Fall, 2001, 22.
us from our innate, intuitive knowing that leads to an intimate presence within a meaningful universe. Mechanistic science has led us to see the natural world as a commodity to be used, resources to be extracted for the benefit of humans; and McFague concludes "We are being kept in denial about the seriousness of major global issues by powerful business lobbies and timid politicians, but also by our own reluctance to disrupt the most comfortable lifestyle that any people on earth have ever enjoyed." Their words of wisdom and warning tell of a machine model that is injurious to nature, and a model of economy that has impacted the earth’s ability to survive, let alone flourish. They suggest that as the earth has been polluted and depleted by the systems we in the West have created, our present model of human life must be reformed. They say that it is we in the West who have a moral obligation to act, and we have to start now.

In the beginning, a fundamental contribution of ecology to our body of knowledge about the earth community and ourselves was that all is connected. This principle of communion, it was said, underscores all of life, and all areas of life. In the beginning, ecology taught that life is not ultimately a compartmentalized reality, not a vacuous state of being. Although it may be necessary to temporarily isolate particular pieces so as to study them in a particular way, the isolation of parts is subordinate to the whole. From the beginning, ecology has always had all that it needs to communicate not only an effective methodology for change, but also compelling reasons to do so. At one

time, the discipline easily communicated a story of being that opened its reader up to wonder about life and what it all means. But, as time has passed, and our ecological values came to be subsumed under the umbrella of modern science, there was a shift in consciousness from connectivity to isolation, from intimacy to estrangement. As ecology was co-opted by other forms and disciplines for their own purpose - from technology to economics and even religion - we lost our way of thinking about our lives as part of a wider order and reality. We lost our sense of wonder about the world. For many, the loss of this particular story might answer the question as to why a crisis lies within civilization, and not outside. Says Berman:

Because disenchantment is intrinsic to the scientific world view, the modern epoch contained, from its inception, an inherent instability that severely limited its ability to sustain itself for more than a few centuries. For more than 99 percent of human history, the world was enchanted and man saw himself as an integral part of it. The complete reversal of this perception in a mere four hundred years or so has destroyed the continuity of the human experience and the integrity of the human psyche. It has very nearly wrecked the planet as well. The only hope, or so it seems to me, lies in the reenchantment of the world.73

In support of this hope, some of us are slowly learning what has been true all along: guided by a misinformed conscience and behavior, the human was the one in motion, who moved itself away from the rest of the world. And we are learning that, despite the despair from our actions, the rest of the created world is still here, as it has always been, waiting for us to return.

As we turn back to the world which is our home, many are re-discovering that the only legitimate way to talk, teach, and understand the reality that is life is through a variety of media, because life encompasses all such things. Because we need both practical and creative solutions that are both environmentally sound and economically feasible, we must learn to develop social controls for science and technology to make our society more sustainable and more conscious of their long term impacts. And so, to speak of ecology, the planet and the Universe, one necessarily needs the systems information offered by the framework of modern science. But such information alone is surely inadequate to the task, for science terms are literal, technical, and though they may help you understand, they cannot give you insight. Says Needleman, “We cannot know...with only one part of the human intelligence. To know with the intellect alone is to know beings, but not to know Being itself, which is where meaning resides.”74 In other words, to fully communicate about life, one would also need a palate of color to capture beauty and diversity of form and shape; a sense of movement to convey the dance of dynamic relationship; music to play the symphony of sounds from every corner; and the language of meaning sufficient to tell the story of how things came to be.

In a recent interview, Thomas Berry said that meaning is all a question of story – the literature of a living world – and that it is our nature to tell stories in

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order to find the meaning of our own lives. \textsuperscript{75} And so, one could say that being without a functional cosmology, a story that meets the needs of our time, is at the base of all our difficulties. It seems to me that at the heart of ecology is story. At its beginning, this story explained what the characters were doing and why they were doing it. Since then, much of the story has been captured by modern science, as its narrative changed from an innate, intuitive knowing to the story line of a mechanical universe. Therefore, our ways of connecting to nature have to be re-woven into it. We may need to find a new language to communicate our recovery of intimacy, humility, simplicity, and love. We may need to adopt a new paradigm through which to communicate such values. But just maybe, if the story is strong enough, that's when our saving work for the earth will begin.

Science has given us the gift of evolutionary cosmology, a story which tells us of how the cosmos came to be and much of how it functions. This cosmic story was written by the Universe. And as all of nature talked to us, as we learned from our family the Universe, we received what it communicated and we made out of it a story for ourselves. We are at a point in human history where there is an urgent need for us to learn our way into a new world. But as a species, even if we learn that we must move, more than likely that change cannot occur until enough people become aware of the need for change, and have the desire to do so. As long as contemporary society is working reasonably well, and leaders keep telling the story that this same society is on the right track, few people will listen to and hear a new story urging significant change. In that case,

\textsuperscript{75} Berry, interview by author, notes, Greensboro, N.C., November 17, 2004.
urgently needed change will probably be delayed, and conditions on our planet will probably get worse before they get better. But, nature can be our most powerful teacher, especially as environmental systems no longer work the way they used to.

These days, if we listen, we will hear the Universe speaking to us in very dramatic and very subtle ways about the things that we do to harm the Earth. It is a story told in the hope that we will be prompted to reject what we have become, and begin to re-articulate a story about our earth family – not just ourselves - which will have positive consequences for the whole of species. In many ways, it will not be a new story, for our family story has been told over and over again. Instead, we are called to re-imagine a way to tell the old story in a new way, in a way that takes us back to our origins and engages us in emerging truth once again. We participate in the ongoing creation by telling the story beyond ourselves, and in this manner, we can be made conscious of what we are doing to the world and to its future.

Conclusion

“We are dealing with a wily, crafty enemy – ourselves – as the perpetrators of the ecocrisis,” says McFague. “The moral issue of our day – and the vocation to which we are called – is whether we and other species will live, and if so, how well. For it is not enough to change our lifestyle; we must change
what we value. In light of this, I believe that long term solutions to our environmental ills – or rather, our crisis of civilization - will ultimately come from an ethical conviction that saving the environment is the right thing to do. Of course, science must necessarily inform the conversation. But when it comes to making tough decisions about how the human species will choose to live on this earth, we will need to dig deeply into our values – our collective sense of right and wrong concerning each other, the generations that follow us, and the life with which we share this planet. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said:

The gods we worship write their names on our faces, be sure of that. And a man will worship something – have no doubt about that either. He may think that his tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of his heart – but it will out. That which dominates will determine his life and character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping, we are becoming.

And so, we must all begin to understand our world, and ourselves, at the deepest level possible for us so that we can make the best decisions that we can in an increasingly complex and precarious world.

Science can study people’s responses to a sunset. It can analyze the biological, social, and cultural implications of war; and it can demonstrate the consequences of pollution. It can provide people with information that may help them make a value or moral judgment about something. But science by itself cannot make value judgments. It cannot say that a sunset is beautiful. And science cannot make moral judgments. It cannot say that war is immoral or a

76 McFague, 17.
river should not be polluted. Facts are useful, but they won't persuade you to do something. Humans are complex beings. We make decisions about what to do through a mix of head and heart, rational thought and intuition. It is clear that the critical ecological and social challenges and choices facing humanity emphasize that in the final analysis the problem we face is an ethical one. Values are the lenses through which we will judge the information that we receive. One could argue that ours are clearly inscribed in the epitaph on the U.S. National Academy of Sciences in Washington, DC, which states: "To Science, pilot of industry, conqueror of diseases, multiplier of the harvest, explorer of the universe, revealer of nature's laws, eternal guide to truth." These are the values that, for many people in the West, have been guiding thought and action for many years: some ecological, some anti-ecological. It is time for us to decide if together, all of these define who we still want to be.

Those who want change have long been saying that if we are to make the great transition to a just, sustainable, and peaceful world, we must reconstruct our ideas of the "good life" and our understanding of right conduct as individuals, institutions, and nations, and choose a better way. Science has been a magnificent phase of the human.78 It has given us an important understanding of the mechanics of an emerging, evolving cosmic story. But through our worship of science to the exclusion of many other ways of knowing, the planet has lost its integrity, and we have been denied the ability to see our lives as part of a wider order. If we are lost in what Vaclav Havel calls egoistic anthropocentrism: a habit

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of seeing ourselves as masters of the Universe who can do whatever occurs to us, maybe the time has come to know the world beyond commodity and resource. Says Havel, "Whether our world is to be saved from everything that threatens it today depends above all on whether human beings come to their senses, whether they understand the degree of their responsibility and discover a new relationship to the very miracle of Being...The main task in the coming era is...a radical renewal of our sense of responsibility. Our conscience must catch up to our reason, otherwise we are lost." 79

Some people believe that the context for humans – for all of life – is within the deep mystery of the Universe. A genuine part of external reality, which is everywhere, and always in immediate contact with the realm of nature, it tells a story that says we belong to an immense reality which cannot all be researched and for some of which there are no names. Within this mythic world, the garden of the soul has been planted with the ideas, dreams, and stories of its creatures: the seeds of imagination, an imaginative framework of meaning. If we do not tend to these seeds of imagination, does that mean that our world will lose ideas, and the capacity to dream itself forward? We are told that the language of modern science no longer has the ability to communicate this level of wisdom. If this is true, could the kind of narrative and symbol used within the Sermon on the Mount teach us what we need to learn to discern the deeper earth where meaning is identified and given life? Communicating the principles of ecology on a meaning level is essential to establishing a life-generating human-earth

relationship. If the story of ecology has lost a way of communicating the essence/values/meaning of its principles, could the same qualities be conveyed through in the Beatitudes? Can the principles of the Beatitudes evoke the kind of shift in consciousness necessary for dynamic change – to deal with the problems within and before us and to realize a vision of a healthy, integral Universe? The work of the next three chapters will attempt to lay the groundwork for discerning the answer.
CHAPTER FOUR:

OUR ECO/SPIRITUAL HERITAGE

Introduction

Throughout human culture, the religious and spiritual beliefs of all faith systems have often framed the way people value and treat the Universe. Moral instruction is basic to religion, and most religious consciousness is firmly rooted in an ethic which seeks to actualize such values as reciprocity, justice, and community. Although each religion expresses it in their own way, the value expressed in Christianity as "loving your neighbor as yourself," of learning to see the world through the experiences and needs of others, is exceedingly ecological and absolutely essential to Christian spiritual life. At the heart of this spiritual value lies the responsibility to engage in a deep questioning of society's powers and values which cast doubt on unrestricted technological development without moral purpose, the acquisition of wealth without wisdom, and the addictive pursuit of pleasure. In addition, unlike the language of science, inherent in religious or spiritual language is the capacity to speak from an emotional depth to the experience of mystery, presence, and the communion of all things. Therefore, to many people, Christianity – like other religions or spiritualities - is in a unique position to communicate these qualities of life that the Universe knows
to be true for all things. For many, the Christian faith is the context out of which an effective voice of ecological wisdom has emerged.

As leading scientists have sounded alarms over the declining condition of the planet, nearly all the nation’s major Christian churches and denominations have in some manner now begun to deliberate on environmentalism as a vocational responsibility. In his message on the 1990 World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul II said: "In our day there is a growing awareness that world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustice among people and nations, but also by a lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources, and by a progressive decline in the quality of life."\textsuperscript{80} In 2002, the Catholic Digest reported on a demonstration of over 100 ministers, priests, rabbis, and their supporters. Protesting against gas-guzzling SUVs outside a strip of car dealerships, one United Church of Christ minister held up a placard asking motorists, "What Would Jesus Drive?"\textsuperscript{81} From "Redwood rabbis" who are working to preserve forests, to Episcopalians focusing on renewable energy; from conservative evangelical Noah congregations trying to save endangered species, to the National Catholic Rural Life Conference which teaches about the effects of pollution caused by large-scale factory farms, it is clear that in some measure, ecological sensitivity has begun to reach the highest echelons of church life in recent years. This new religious


\textsuperscript{81} Joan Lowyer, "Can Catholics Save the Earth?," Catholic Digest, August 2002, 70-71.
environmentalism is called, among other things, earth stewardship, green spirituality, or creation care. Based on the theological view that God expects humankind to care for the world, not abuse it, this kind of theological teaching on the environment has gained national recognition. As it does, more and more scholars and activists from both secular and religious perspectives are beginning to look at religious involvement as a sign of hope: hope that the long term perspective and moral authority of Christianity, expressed as a mode of consciousness that supports a mutually-enhancing relationship with the Universe, will make a difference in the ecological concerns of our time; hope that one day voices of fear for the consequences of human behavior will be supplanted by voices of love: love for God, and love for all that has been created.

**Negative Implications of Christianity**

But for many other people, there have always been problems in using the Christian tradition as a foundation for developing an environmental ethic. To begin with, some feel that the environment has never not been an issue. To them the causes for concern have long been with us, and they are resentful that the religious response to the ecological crisis has only recently emerged. They maintain that, in the face of an increasingly degraded world, the fact of the Church’s historical silence should render it of no further consequence on matters involving ecological resuscitation. Another problem is that the Bible, a *guide* for theology, does not explicitly address environmental issues, per se. Environmental ethics based on this source, then, are necessarily derived from
scholars' perceptions of what the relevant passages are and how they should be interpreted, and they wonder, "Who gets to decide which interpretation is legitimate?" In addition, Christianity itself contains many different sects and systems of belief. Representatives of the various denominations often disagree with one another, making it difficult to identify a core of common doctrines and beliefs on which to build an environmental ethic. The Christian tradition is more than 2,000 years old and exists in hundreds of different cultures. As such, the variety of interpretations and differences of belief open up the Christian faith to the probability that at some point, one way of interpreting, speaking, and teaching about the ideas within the Bible will be favored over another way. Frankly, for the majority of those concerned with Christian involvement in creating an appropriate ecological response, it is in the "living out" of particular interpretations that has led many people to make the charge that the Christian tradition is suspect on matters of the environment. Indeed, some scholars have even determined that certain tenets of Christianity are among the principle causes of the environment's demise.

Here are some examples: In his classic paper published in Science almost forty years ago, Lynn White Jr. makes the case that the ecological crisis of Western society is rooted in Christianity. In this seminal work that has received widespread attention over the years from scientists as well as humanists, White argues that "Western Christianity, the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen...not only established a dualism of man and nature
but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his purpose.  

White says that the disruption of our global environment, a product of the growth of a dynamic technology and science, are deeply grounded in Christian dogma, whether we recognize these attitudes as Christian, or not. And White is not alone in this critique. Wilhelm states that “American Christians generally have little awareness of the larger consequences of the mass destruction that is taking place on earth. Why isn’t Christianity dealing with the eco-crisis in a priority way?...That we haven’t done so reveals that a disturbance...is seemingly imbedded in our Christian theological tradition, in our very language, in our Christian world-view of reality.” And finally, it was Thomas Berry who, asserting that humans have no respect or reverence for anything, then places much of the responsibility on the shoulders of the Christian church because, historically, it has encouraged domination of the earth. He said, “Humans are at the center of the Universe with far-reaching rights. This mindset of dominance and focus on redemption devalues the natural world....Christianity’s greatest contribution to the environmental problem is that it has promoted the centrality of humanity…and accorded secondary status to the rest of creation.”

It is true that for many, since its inception, the bible has been interpreted primarily as a narrative of the human role in the history of creation – a human story in an historical Universe. The scripture passage most commonly cited in

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83 Wilhelm, 274.
84 Thomas Berry, in God, the Environment, and the Good Life, video, PBS, 1996.

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support of these charges is the myth of origin found in the book of Genesis.85

This first of two creation stories has long been used to explain and justify the
ways human beings relate to one another and to the non-human world, and is
identified by many as the very context from which the human species' anthropocentric inclination has sprung:

Let us make the human being in our image and likeness. Let them have
dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the cattle and
all the wild animals...(and God blessed them saying), "Be fertile and
increase; fill the whole earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of
the sea and the birds of the air and all living things that move on the earth."86

Reference to humanity's being created in the image, or likeness, of God have been some of the most influential Biblical verses in the history of the Christian tradition. Expressing the enormous value of a human life over the rest of nature, this story of the beginning of all things is, for many Christians, a narrative of how things came to be, and how things were, and presumably ought, to be. This first creation narrative in the Bible has been elaborated into cosmologies and theories of the soul, and its particularly anthropocentric interpretation has often been the context of ideological support for human dominance and exploitation. Many have charged that once people accepted this particular interpretation as their own story, our sense of the divine – like so much else, affected by reductivism - moved from the cosmos to one perceived in historical manifestation. The human species thus became a people created by a religious world that moved its perception of divine in the Universe, to perceptions

85 Genesis 1:1-24a, NRSV.
86 Genesis 1:26-28, NRSV.
of Divine primarily in human relations. Vulnerable to alienation from a
cosmological order, perhaps it was inevitable, then, that this anthropocentric
interpretation would lead people to internalize that they were the center of the
story of creation. Dominion over the earth and all that it contains, and the
commandment to fill the whole earth and subdue it, certainly conveys enormous
power. Such a claim to power by human beings over all non-human creation
assumes the possibility, all too often realized, of scientific and technological
exploitation of the earth. As Himes states, "The non-human world has been
given to human beings for our good, to be used responsibly for our self-
development, to answer to our purposes and thus to fulfill God's purpose in
creating it. To be sure, this stewardship metaphor prohibits...the mere
exploitation of nature by humankind. But undeniably, the role of stewardship
carries the implication that non-human creation is to be used."

It is important to remember that one biblical text will not adequately
address any of the Christian tradition's knowledge of divine-human-nature
relations. Individual passages are not able to definitively answer the question,
"What does the bible say about the role of humans in the Universe?" because
they are taken out of context of both the full range of biblical material and the
world which is in question. Additionally, most scholars agree that the Bible does
not have an answer to every question, one-liners to prescribe what one is to do
with particular circumstances. The whole context of where the stories began and
where they go - the entire movement of scripture - must be considered before

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87 Himes, 109.
one can begin to discern its intent. Quoting a few biblical passages either tends to narrow the ecology-religion discussion or it barely begins to open up thoughtful deliberation regarding helpful Christian resources. Nevertheless, many, many people have begun to insist that it is this particular story's fundamental place in contemporary Christian consciousness that has legitimized nature's separation from and subjugation to the human species, giving Christians permission to live out a religiously sanctioned belief that the Universe serves at their pleasure. According to Jim Berry, the historical interpretation of the first creation narrative in Genesis “fails to place the human in the context out of which the human derives...(we) see ourselves as apart from nature. Separate from it. Superior to it. It is this belief that permits us to exploit creation to the degree that we are killing ecosystems and ruining those very things upon which we depend for life.”

The influence specific interpretations have on the kind of word a community receives about the nature of God, the particular qualities of personhood they are encouraged to aspire towards, and the values necessary for relationship – between themselves and God, and themselves and the community of life – cannot be underestimated. The interpretation that a community accepts as true determines the particular values they embrace. For many people, this old story has failed both humankind and the Universe. Concludes Berry, “We have to change our ways if our descendents are to have a decent world to live in.”

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89 Ibid, 39.
White states that "what we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the human-nature relationship. More science and technology are not going to get us out of this present ecologic crisis until we either find a new religion, or re-think the old one."\(^9\) So, if we are to change our ways we need a new story. But what might that be? And how do we get there? White's article suggests that the solution to our environmental crisis lies in either abandoning the Christian religion altogether, or in altering it significantly. It is true that the Christian tradition, as it is advertised by the voices of some of its leaders, and by the actions of some members of its faith communities, is suspect on all kinds of issues — including environmental ones. Sometimes, as it is practiced and as it is taught, the tradition is incredibly anthropocentric, hierarchical, ecologically irresponsible, divisive, and marginalizing. Because it is also, often, self-promoting, many believe that the tradition brings whatever distrust, dismissal, and even distain it receives upon itself. It would be understandable if the people decide that the Christian tradition is so filled with baggage as to render it ineffective to the cause. But if people decide, with respect to the environment, that there may yet be "more light and truth to break forth from this holy word,"\(^9\) we will need to turn our focus to other, equally legitimate themes within Christianity.

\(^9\) White, 4.

\(^9\) As John Robinson, pastor to the active separatists in Leiden, Holland, said goodbye to the 102 Pilgrims who set sail on the Mayflower in 1620 to begin their long journey to America, he encouraged them with these words.
Positive Implications of Christianity

Perhaps not surprisingly, the very same plurality within the Christian tradition which made the first, anti-ecological, anthropocentric interpretation possible also assures a place for a dynamic of ecological integrity. There have been many in the Christian community who received a message from the tradition that stressed integrity, servanthood, accountability, gratitude, justice, and humility. They were taught to love others no matter what (inclusive of other living beings) by a God who also loved no matter what – never consciously learning that they were more than the nature they were created with. This kind of teaching wasn’t created in a vacuum. Those ideas had to come from somewhere. While I believe that White, Berry, Wilhelm and others correctly identify the dominant strain or core of Western theism that represents God as transcending the world and humanity as exercising dominion over the natural order, clearly there are other elements in the structure of biblical religion which, in effect, counterbalance the invitation to exercise human sovereignty over nature. When we reexamine the history of scripture and tradition, and refocus Christian affirmations and ethics in ecologically alert terms, what is revealed is a moral framework which affirms that all of the earth community is valuable to God, who continues to create, sustain, and redeem the whole. It illuminates an ethic of simplicity, humility, and justice for all. And, it emphasizes the human obligation to express respect and care for Earth: as God’s creation and life’s home, and the embodiment of the power, wisdom, and love of God.
White proposed that our reinterpretation of the Christian tradition begin with St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis was born in Assisi, Umbria, Italy and founded the Franciscan order of friars in the Roman Catholic Church. As a model for Christian living, a man who embodies "an alternative Christian view," St. Francis stressed a theme of care and stewardship for the divine creation, and gave persistent testimony that God is intimately involved with the world, and indeed incorporates the world into divine life. Called by Rohr, "the greatest radical in Christian history since Christ,"92 the key to St. Francis’ faith lies in his belief in the virtue of humility for humankind as a species.

In his famous poem, "The Canticle of Brother Sun,"93 St. Francis is believed to express some of his deepest feelings and insights. The poem is a clear contrast to a more traditional anthropocentric Christian perspective by stressing a nonhierarchical spiritual egalitarianism with nature. St. Francis does not believe that the elements of nature belong to the category of "things"; rather, he emphasizes his personal relationship with them. In "The Canticle of Brother Sun," St. Francis joyously celebrates the close spiritual relationship of all of nature to God.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.
To you alone, Most High, do they belong, and no man is worthy to mention Your name.
Praised by You, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no living man can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm.
Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.\textsuperscript{94}

St. Francis did not believe in humankind's dominion over the earth, rather his was a faith that stressed a communion of all things. Two central themes of his life were poverty and the unity of all creatures, reflecting his belief that humans, in the end, are parts of a larger whole to which their personal interests and ambitions are subordinate. To St. Francis, all creatures are united in the depths of their being by the fact of being creature. The discovery of one's finiteness is the recognition of one's poverty. True poverty, the poverty of the spirit, is the realization that there is no intrinsic reason for one's being at all. It is this poverty that unites all creatures. Martin Buber, so deeply rooted in the

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
biblical tradition, explored the meaning of companionship under the rubric "I-Thou." As Himes describes it, "Thou is always a companion. It cannot be possessed, can never become my 'thou.' When respected as 'thou,' the other is seen to be of inherent value, to be an end and not a means to an end." Like Buber, St. Francis' model of Christianity presents non-human creation as "thou," as companion to humanity, and insists that the human person has no more claims to intrinsic being than a plant or animal, a star or stone. Therefore, if any creature is worthless, all creatures are worthless, because, precisely as creatures, all are equal.

The retrieval of the companionship theme which evokes a different attitude toward creation benefits the environmental cause. This difference in attitude is reflected in an environmental ethic grounded on a relational anthropology. St. Francis' "companionship faith" implies mutuality, thus excluding the reduction of either side of the relationship to a tool of the other's purposes. As T. S. Elliott once said, "There is no life that is not lived in community, and no community not lived in praise of God."

Contrary to White's article, revolutionary testimony is not confined to the fraternal model of St. Francis of Assisi, as is suggested. It is an unfortunate fact that themes which include care for and mutuality with the Divine and its creation have not been dominant themes throughout Christianity's influence. But even so, they are recurrent, legitimate motifs - central elements in the structure of

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95 Himes, 109.
Christian religion and in its praxis. In the biblical text, for example, some scholars have concluded that one could argue that it is the *goodness of creation* - not anthropocentrism - which is the heart of the Genesis account. As a complex and beautiful world is gradually created in the image of the Divine, again and again God gazes on it with love and says, “It is good.” This vision of peace and harmony speaks to the primacy of the planetary reality, and is a significant departure from the kind of interpretation that White hinges the entire ecological crisis on. And there are other examples: The great flood narrative in the book of Genesis ends with the establishment of a covenant between God and every living creature\(^6\); throughout the Psalms, there is a celebration of nature, one which constantly links all that has been created with one another and with a God who was everything and everywhere; the book of Job speaks to the virtue of humility, and extends to the reader a sense of consequence for actions which diminish the Universe\(^7\); and in Revelation there is the vision of a New Jerusalem on earth in which springs of living water feed a city of justice and well-being.\(^8\) Finally, there is the central teaching of Christianity - the incarnation of the Christ figure. The context of this figure lies in a fundamental understanding of the Divine that is integrally related to the human, for a deity who is distant cannot be the God who loves and embraces the world in its own form.

\(^6\) Genesis 9:9-17, NRSV.
\(^7\) Job 12:7-10, 38:4-27, NRSV.
\(^8\) Revelation, 21:1 NRSV.
There are also strains in the Christian tradition that focus on cultivating the qualities particular to a model of relationship between the earth, the Spirit, and us. The animate spirituality of the Celtic period, the custodial model of the Benedictine monasteries and convents, and the fertility model presented by Hildegard of Bingen, to name a few, present a view of God and God's world which belies a faith that deep in the heart of matter, everything is interconnected, all is well, and all manner of things shall be well. And finally, of course, there is the integral model of Teilhard de Chardin, the French paleontologist and Catholic priest who theorized in the 1930's that there is a spiritual dynamic in the evolutionary process.

From the work of evolution first described by Darwin, Teilhard developed an understanding of the universe process as a self-organizing one in which the entire community of life is derived. He came to believe that the Universe was in a continuous state of change – a state of genesis and cosmogenesis, in which everything is continually changing into something new. From Teilhard's model of panenthesim, the mystery of the divine in everything – in which the love that moves the sun and stars beams out of every atom, molecule, face, and flower – came Thomas Berry's essential message which outlines the necessity of establishing a mutually enhancing human presence on the planet. Primary in his elaboration on Teilhard's model is his understanding of the psychic-physical character of the unfolding universe.

According to Berry, "we can now understand that the universe, from its beginning, was not a mechanistic thing, but that there was a psychic/spiritual
dimension from the beginning as well as a physical/material capacity."⁹⁹ In other words, every aspect of development of the Universe, from its beginning, has included an expansion of that consciousness dimension of the Universe over the course of a long sequence of transformation. As an absolute, unbreakable unit, nothing in the Universe can ever be separated from anything else. From the bonding of molecules to the capacity of affection, binding is the primary goal of being. According to Thomas Berry, the story of creation in Genesis and contemporary science agree with two things: the universe had a beginning in measurable time, and the unity of the universe. And so, to tell the story of a rock you must tell the story of the Universe. Every atom, no matter how distant from another, is immediately present to and influencing every other atom in the universe – without passing through intervening space. Everything is immediately present to everything else and influencing everything else. This is a single, coherent universe.

Our problem as a species is that, so far, we don't know how to deal with the emergent Universe that has become what it is by a sequence of irreversible transformative episodes moving from lesser to greater complexity and structure, and lesser to greater experiences of consciousness. As our creation myths underlie what we see as normal in the world, we need to construct a new, sacred myth, one that identifies with the Genesis story, and also incorporates a new understanding of the universe as an emergent, irreversible process. Ours must be a story that tells of our ultimate truth of connection: to the world, to all that has

⁹⁹ Berry, first interview.
come before, to a binding creative spirit at the center of all creation, to a salvation story that has everything to do with everything - one that isn’t for humankind alone. It must understand that revelation found in the natural world and in the wider universe around us is the primary divine revelation – the way that the divine communicates the story of how our universe began, evolved, and brought us forth. Berry asserts, that “this new story will necessarily include a reinterpretation of religious history, of the Christ figure, and of the entity called God which teaches us that what is real can be discovered as much in a leaf, a breeze, or the smell of green as it can in any human construct.”

In his lecture series, Bias from the Bottom, Richard Rohr reminds us that for most of its 2000 year history, a select group of people have been interpreting the bible, almost exclusively. He says, “This group has tended to be male, European, educated, ordained, and comfortable...who look at life through certain paradigms, through a certain set of glasses.” These interpreters represent the “establishment.” As it is the nature of power that those who have it do what they can to keep it, whether consciously or not, it has been this select group’s business to interpret the biblical stories so as to be able to maintain a level of comfort (creature comfort, bias comfort, etc) to which they had become accustomed. The problem with this paradigm is that the point of the Bible is aimed at transforming how we see our lives, and how we live them out, not maintaining the status quo. So, if past or current interpretations are diminishing

100 Ibid.
the world which came to be – however one imagines that happened – then it is appropriate and correct to reinterpret the stories in light of what we know to be true for us today. As a people we have changed: we know different things about ourselves and the Universe, and for the bible to be a relevant source of instruction and inspiration, it is our right and responsibility to reimagine it in a contemporary context. This is not a new idea. People have been reinterpreting the bible since its inception, and are justified in doing so. It is a process integral to its use in a living faith.

As increasing numbers of Christian ethicists and theologians respond to the environmental challenge, it is clear that many people will be inclined to cling to the past – to an interpretation of scripture that, while fundamentally authorizing the exploitation of nature (which is inclusive of humankind) has, at least in part, served their immediate, narrow interests well. Still, Hessel says, “The multiple of voices within the Christian tradition testifies to the capacity for change in what remains a continuous line of development. Thus, even the communities most inclined to invoke authoritative figures or texts in fact regularly take into account new data and respond creatively to the demands of novel collaborations.”102 And so, perhaps others, when faced with the realities of our ecological conditions, will at least entertain, if not fully embrace, a new and vigorous effort to reimagine an ecological ethos, inclusive of religion, for our time. Such an ethos will illuminate the interconnectedness of life on Earth, and urge the human species to establish


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a new consciousness of reciprocity which recognizes the Universe as a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.

Conclusion

Modern environmentalism has challenged and changed religion throughout the world. Awakened by environmental activists, many religious Christian communities and theologians have recognized that the earth as a whole is in an unprecedented predicament and are trying to respond accordingly. Their response includes a deep concern with the world's pain, a searching religious self-examination of how we all participate in the ruin of the earth, and an emerging fundamental understanding of how our ethics must be framed with humility, compassion, and self-awareness.

Does it make sense to think that the religious attempt to remake the world in the image of God and compassion has any chance of success? Brockelman says "All great spiritual traditions urge us to see a more ultimate and meaningful reality beyond the individual, the culture to which he or she belongs, or nature pictured in a utilitarian manner. Although they express it in different ways, those traditions are all saying that this ultimate reality to which we are called...liberates and transforms human beings by freeing them from the shackles of their own – personal and/or cultural – self centered passions and desires."\(^{103}\) There has always been an aspect of religious life that seeks not only God, Enlightenment,

\(^{103}\) Brockelman, 29.
and personal morality but also the ethical transformation of a society as a whole. So, perhaps as long as we recognize that hope is very far from certainty, we can hope that a reexamined Christian tradition can help us find within ourselves a willingness to act in the face of sorrow and loss, to look clearly at what must be changed and act - even without knowing what will happen.

When we destroy the natural world, we destroy the ground of our religious imagination, for our ability to imagine what God is like owes everything to the world around us. Ideas of God that are inclusive of wonder and mystery exist precisely because we have always lived on a planet that is itself full of wonder and mysteries. Clearly, learning to see the universe, and the earth that gave us birth, as sacred mysteries is the key to turning the world around. Only when we affirm the unity of nature and spirit, that the earth’s soul is our own, can we become life-giving participants in the regeneration of the world. The positive implications for ecology embodied by the faith called Christianity lies in its potentiality for good, and in the possibility for transformation. Particular historical interpretation and implementation of its most basic tenets have for too long been guiding human lives to the detriment of all other life. But those ideas and values, however embedded in institutional practice and historical memory, do not have to be “the last word.” Christianity’s roots hold out the possibility for sacred imagination to rethink religious perspective and offer a way to reorient ourselves within the framework of nature as a whole. We have already been given the resources to get where we need to go.
The best hope for a renewed earth, many feel, is a reawakened belief in the Spirit as the divine force within the cosmos who continually indwells everywhere and works in amazing ways to sustain all forms of life. This sense of the Universe as sacred in the context of contemporary mode of being, and an understanding of revelation in the natural world as the primary divine revelation is an urgent sensitivity that the Christian tradition can cultivate. Gottlieb says, “All we can be sure of is that in living out what is most sacred to ourselves we choose that path that is most likely to take us all to that new world, the one in which, in the words of the prophet Amos, ‘justice and righteousness well up like a never-ending stream,’ and where human beings together, heal both the earth and their own hearts.”

As we are sensitized in our capacity to hear and think about the psychic consciousness dimension - the voice of everything, we shall be poised to understand how the human community and the living forms of Earth might become a life-giving presence to each other, that we may all be moved forward to honor the earth as the epiphany of God.

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CHAPTER FIVE:

EXEGESIS - CRITICAL INVESTIGATION OF MEANING IN THE BIBLE

Introduction: The Exegetical Method

That Jesus, himself, did not leave a literary record of his actual sayings is widely accepted by contemporary scholars. It is also widely accepted that Jesus did not comment on the environment, the science of ecology, or an ecological crisis in the manner that we speak of them today. In order to discern the existence of an ecological consciousness, his words must be read through an interpretive lens.

The Bible itself orients our reading of God in the events of the world, and teaches us, precisely, to recognize God in present self-revelation. Kaiser once said, "Human history is constant novelty, and so is the presence of God accompanying it." 105 But a genuinely new word is generated first by representing the real horizon of meaning actually present in the text itself. A conscientious reader of scripture must always remember that, as is true with many ancient texts, the world of the Bible is, in effect, a foreign country, requiring the reader to be bicultural as to present and past. We do the text a grave disservice when we try to impose 21st century assumptions of what scripture

should say on a text from thousands of years ago. All sorts of troubling doctrines have been and continue to be derived from the Bible by readers unwilling to approach it on its own terms as an ancient text. By the same token, we need to recognize that scripture contains precepts that we may find troubling today, but that make perfect sense within their historical context. Consequently, most scholars agree that the task of the biblical interpreter, in enabling meaningful conversation with an ancient text, is, first of all, to articulate as clearly and carefully as possible, what sort of information the author(s) intended to give.

Exegesis is at the heart of all Biblical study. It is a means of questioning and probing the text in order to discover its original intent and meaning. It requires that one approach the text with as little as possible of their own presuppositions and expectations, and a willingness on the part of the investigator to enter into the presuppositions of the writer or speaker of the text. In The Exegetical Method, authors Otto Kaiser and Werner Kummel offer these remarks: “Critical historical exegesis does not begin with the hermeneutical question of the meaning of the texts for the present time, whether in terms of faith-acceptance or of systematico-theological reflection or of practico-theological application. Rather it asks the historical question of the meaning the biblical text has within its original horizon of meaning.”106 In other words, as a text without context is just a pretext for whatever the researcher wants it to mean, every effort

must be made to avoid a genre mistake by studying the *Sermon on the Mount* in its original historical, literary, rhetorical, and social contexts.

To discover the objective meaning of the Sermon on the Mount, that is, to learn from the text what it says about the subject matter being discussed in it, and also what, if any, bearing it has on the principles of ecology and on the ecological questions of our time, the exegesis will examine the following:

- **Context:** what is the sitz-im-Leben, or life setting at the time of composition; what is the identity of both the author and the readers for whom the text was intended;

- **Text:** identify issues of transmission; analyze key words; examine comparative readings;

- **Meaning:** summarize key theological ideas

It is not easy to remove ourselves from our world of time and space, particularly when trying to bring a contemporary question - like environmental issues - to the *Sermon on the Mount*. But, it is essential in order to enter into the "world of the text." One has to know what the text intended to say before one can interpret its meaning for today - a question which can only be answered by way of an historical investigation into the text. Croatio says that "The tension between a fixed text in a cultural milieu that is no longer ours and a living word capable of forging history can only be resolved by fertile re-reading to tap its reservoir of meaning."\(^{107}\) Although the bible is far removed in time and place, it is

\[\text{\textsuperscript{107} Croatio, 15.}\]
not a relic of a people. The struggle of exegesis, then, is to allow the text freedom in expressing its own content and intent, and not to make it a vehicle for our own thoughts.\textsuperscript{108}

The New Testament

The Bible is divided into two portions – the Old Testament, or Hebrew Scripture, and the New Testament – which are two collections of the commands and promises containing the covenant of God's dealing with God's people, brought together in one volume. The books of the Hebrew Scriptures were written, edited, and collected over the course of many centuries (approximately 1300 BCE – 150 BCE). Years then passed between the writings of the two portions. The New Testament begins with the biography of Jesus Christ and His ministry, which is recorded in the four Gospels. The New Testament contains a collection of the teachings of Jesus Christ, as well as the letters of the apostles to the early Christian communities. The New Testament is a testament to the life, teachings, and impact of Jesus Christ on the world and on the early Christian communities. It is a source of inspiration, guidance, and understanding for Christians and others around the world.
portions, when the prophets fell silent, and nothing new was added to the Bible. During this time, Middle Eastern empires rose and fell, and the tiny nation of Israel suffered under the domination of greater powers like Greece and Rome. And then, Jesus was born. To believers, the arrival of Jesus signaled the beginning of a new era. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God entered history in a personal way, making it unmistakably clear to them that God was on their side. For many, at first, it was too good to be true. But over time, men and women began to believe it. To their great surprise, their faith directed them to living in a world where God had the first, and last, word on everything. Through this context, of the God that Jesus came to represent, everything had to be re-centered and re-imagined.

Jesus left no literary trail. Information regarding Jesus was initially transmitted orally by his immediate followers. After his death, the men and women who came to believe in him and in his message told stories about him, and sang songs, recited poetry, and offered prayers. It wasn't until many years after his death that the gospels were written and put together over a period of several decades and in several styles. Of these stories, the most lengthy would have been the accounts covering the week leading up to Jesus' death, and the subsequent accounts of his resurrection. It was also during this time that some of the materials were re-told in the koine, or common, Greek of the time, instead of the Aramaic that Jesus and his first followers spoke. It is a commonly held assumption that this form of Greek was known and used by most of the people of the Roman Empire to whom the first Christian missionaries carried the gospels.
This Byzantine text originated in the late third century around Antioch. Adopted in Constantinople, this was “the text which was found in almost all late manuscripts, and so became the basis of the first printed editions of the Greek New Testament in the sixteenth century, beginning with Erasmus' edition of 1516,” says Throckmorton. By the eighth century, the Byzantine text was practically the only Greek text being widely used. Circulated first in separate scrolls, each scroll contained one of several narratives and accounts of Jesus' sayings, miracles, and wonders. Over the years, new material concerning the life of Jesus and his teachings was discovered and added from time to time. Then genealogies were inserted. In the course of time these scrolls were incorporated into single narratives.

The New Testament books were written within a period of about one hundred years (CE 50 – CE 150). Four literary forms categorize these books. Almost half of the New Testament consists of the first four accounts of the life of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), and the message that the writers believe he brought to the earth. Each of these books - called gospels (“good-tidings,” or “good news”) – has a different focus and a different audience. Taken together, they are intended to give a picture of the life, ministry of healing and teaching, and death and resurrection of Jesus. The book of Acts is an account of the first thirty years following the death of Jesus. Continuing the history into the period after Jesus' death, it tells of the early church, and the spread of Christian

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faith. The next twenty-one books are in the form of epistles, or letters. Borrowing from Hellenistic Judaism, they are a collection of ethical and doctrinal instructions which came down from the popular philosophy of the ancient world. These instructions were written by the apostles—who added beliefs and messages from the Christian faith—to nourish and encourage the early Christian church. The last book is an apocalypse or revelation, full of visions, mythical folklore, and vivid symbols. It is the only New Testament book that concentrates on prophecy. To some, this book is a disclosure of God's will for the future. Completing the story, begun in Genesis, of the cosmic battle between good and evil, Revelation ends with a picture of a new heaven and a new earth.

No complete, original manuscripts of the New Testament remain. What do exist are early manuscripts of the text in Aramaic (perhaps the oldest), Latin, Greek, and Coptic as well as quotations of early ecclesiastical writers found within the New Testament itself. Lacking explicit original information, it is difficult to determine with certainty not only what was intended as the message of Jesus, but also why and how the present books of the New Testament were gathered into one collection. Even so, many scholars accept that St. Athanasius was the first to mark the list of twenty-seven books, as canonical or authoritative by the fourth century in a Festal Letter from CE 367. It must be noted, however, that not all Christian communities were willing to follow the Athanasian list, nor accept it as authoritative—particularly in the East.

In any country the records of popular teaching and learning invariably are found to be written in the tongue of the common folk. This is also true of the
sacred writings. In most if not all religions of humankind, when possible, the sacred teachings have been written down first in the language of the founder as well as the people to which the message was intended. Greek was the first language of Western Christianity, and in fact most contemporary English translations of the words of Jesus come from the Greek. This Textus Receptus, or "Received text" is the Byzantine text, which was the text first translated into modern tongue. The New Testament version most familiar to the West, the King James Version, was translated into English from this type of text. But many biblical scholars have come to agree that not a word of the New Testament was originally transmitted nor, for that matter understood, through the lens of Greek or any other European language. Lamsa remarks, "If Greek had become the language of Palestine, it would have become the literary language of the Jews. But it has never been used by the Jews, and there is not a single Greek-written prayer in the Jewish prayer book. Aramaic and Hebrew are the two closely related Semitic languages in which all sacred Jewish literature is written."¹¹⁰ Semitic Christianity preceded Greek and Roman forms of Christianity by many years. Jesus and his disciples were Galileans and his first followers were Galileans, Jews, Syrians, and Assyrians. All these peoples were closely held together by ties of lineage, culture, and language, which was Aramaic.

Aramaic eventually became Israel's vernacular tongue. This came about as the result of the destruction of the national independence of the Jews when

the people were removed from their homeland. Around 721 BCE, the Assyrians carried away the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, and scattered them throughout Mesopotamia (Northern Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan). The lands of the Jews were repopulated with Assyrians brought from Edessa and other regions beyond the Euphrates. “These events prepared the way for that great change by which the Jewish nation parted with its national tongue. In some districts, it was replaced entirely by Aramaic, in others by the adoption of Aramaized Hebrew forms,” suggests Bacher. Such a change was inevitable, due largely to the realities of exile and the long, continued influence and power of the Assyrian Empire once the Jews returned to their own land. Even nowadays, Jews in northern Mesopotamia, Kurdistan, and Persia still speak and pray in an Aramaic dialect known as “Leshana Galoth, the ‘language of captivity’,” states Errico.

From the 6th century BCE, Aramaic continued to spread as the vernacular in the Palestinian region and was the diplomatic language of the then known Eastern world. Some passages in Ezra (Hebrew Scriptures), primarily official documents, reflect the fact that the Persian empire recognized the position of Aramaic by making one form of it an official language – the “Official Aramaic.” Jewish colony at Elephantine in Upper Egypt left many Aramaic papyri from the fifth century BCE concerning the building of a Jewish temple there and Passover.

And other documents in Aramaic from this and succeeding generations have been found from Egypt, Palestine, and other Near Eastern countries. By the 1st century BCE, Aramaic was in general use in Palestine, especially in Galilee, although Hebrew was also spoken as a vernacular, especially in Judah. Even on the cross, as a Galilean, Jesus spoke Aramaic, quoting Psalm 22.1 not in Hebrew but in Aramaic. This was the language spoken by Assyrians, Jews, and Syrians of that time, and that which is still spoken and read today in the ancient churches in the Near East.

The original Eastern text of both the New and Old Testaments is called Peshitta which means simple, direct, and original. The Peshitta New Testament is the ancient and authoritative document of the New Testament in use among the Syriac Aramaic speaking people of Palestine, Syria, Mount Lebanon, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Malabar (South India) from the first century CE to the present day. While some of its remnants may be as old as the 2nd century CE, the text resulted from a compilation of scrolls in CE 150. It had its origin in the lands from which Christianity sprang and is written in Aramaic. Says Lamsa, “(The Peshitta) is still the text of more than a million Maronites, Chaldean Roman Catholics in the Near East, the Jacobites, the Malkites, and the Assyrian Christians. These people are the remnant of the ancient churches of Galilee, Jerusalem, Damascus, Antioch, and Edessa.”

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The Gospel of Matthew

The canonical gospels represent a genre all their own, intended to be understood not only as narrative, but at the same time as proclamation. Unlike folk-tales, they purport to retell actual events. Unlike biographies, they concentrate on the public career of Jesus with little or no attention given to his environment, training, and development of character. And the gospels do not give a neutral account of what happened; rather they tell of the work of God in Jesus' ministry. The literary products of a believing community, written with the aim of either changing the reader, or of building up the community's faith, the stories the gospels have to tell are intended to make a difference in the reader's life.

"Gospel authors were not like modern day reporters recording 'just the facts.' Rather, the authors were more like editors, or producers – cutting and splicing the film to create an effect."\textsuperscript{115} The authors of the gospels took the stories and sayings of Jesus and presented them in various ways in order to accent various truths about Jesus' identity, his mission, and his call to discipleship. The first attempt to produce a written gospel, called the Gospel of Mark, was believed to have been made by a disciple of the Apostle Peter. This Gospel is a collection of sayings of Jesus along with several special sources, and formed the basis of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. These three books, (Mark, Matthew, and Luke), are called the Synoptic Gospels, meaning a "seeing

together," and relate to Jesus’ public teaching and ministry in Galilee. The Gospel of John has a more reflective style than the other Gospels. It concerns Jesus’ early Judean ministry as well as the union of the Christian with the Christ.

By introducing the baby who grew up into the man called Jesus, the book of Matthew opens up a new section of the bible, and makes the writers’ intentions clear from the first sentence. Matthew traces Jesus’ lineage through Abraham, and then the great king David, making an important connection for a people to whom genealogy mattered tremendously. In this context, Matthew legitimizes the claim that Jesus, from the humble town of Nazareth, is the very Messiah God had promised the people back in the Hebrew Scripture.116 This first book, then, is the link between the old and the new: Jesus belongs to a royal line, but came to establish a kingdom different from what anyone expected.

We don’t know much about Jesus before the age of thirty from the account of his life and ministry in the Gospel of Matthew. He probably was born shortly before 4 B.C.E., very near the end of the reign of King Herod. He grew up in Nazareth, a small town in the Northern province of Galilee. At that time, Palestine was under Gentile control as part of the Roman Empire, and ruled by Roman appointed kings. As such, many Jews of that area spoke both Aramaic and Greek. Jesus probably went to school from age six to twelve, and learned to read and write through the Torah, like most young boys of that time.

116 see Matthew 1:21-23; Isaiah 7:14, NRSV.
According to scripture, at about age thirty, something compelled Jesus to go to a wilderness preacher of repentance named John the Baptist.\textsuperscript{117} Whether initiated by a religious quest or just idle curiosity, the beginning of Jesus’ ministry is connected to his baptism by John, which places him in the tradition of what we know of Hebraic mysticism in his day. Says Borg,

As he was being baptized by John he had a vision: the heavens opened, momentarily giving him a glimpse into the other world. Through this open door he saw the spirit descending upon him, and a heavenly voice declared Jesus’ identity to him: Thou are my beloved Son; with thee I am well-pleased. Standing as it does at the beginning of his ministry, this vision is reminiscent of the ‘call of the prophets.’ Like them, his ministry began with an intense experience of God.\textsuperscript{118}

Like the prophets before him, this “God-encounter” initiated a particular orientation of Jesus’ impulses and energies. Immediately following this vision from the other world, Jesus goes out alone into the desert\textsuperscript{119} and undergoes a time of testing, what we might call a “vision quest,”\textsuperscript{120} intended to lead participants into a deeper level of consciousness. That seems to have been the case for Jesus. Though we don’t know what happened to him in the desert, his wilderness journey appears to have opened him to trust in a loving Universe. In any event, his experience of God through the baptism and vision was powerful enough to have become the source of an unmistakable mission for his life as well as the energy to see it through. He moved from these experiences into the world

\textsuperscript{117} Matthew 3:13-17, NRSV.
\textsuperscript{119} Matthew 4:1-11, NRSV.
of convention with clarity of heart and purpose: to extend an invitation from God
to a different way of seeing, and a different way of understanding life."¹²¹ From
that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near."¹²²

There is no evidence that Matthew the Tax Collector, one of the twelve
chosen apostles, ever wrote this manuscript. "Early church leaders probably
attributed it to him because his name gave the document credibility and
authority," says Rohr.¹²³ Coming out of a generation removed from Jesus, the
Gospel of Matthew was most likely written during the last third of the first century
(about 85 or 90 CE) which means that Matthew the Tax Collector probably would
have died 20 years or so before the gospel was written. This anonymous
author's command of Greek and rabbinic training suggest that he was a Jewish
Christian of the second generation who was at home in a church located in
Antioch of Syria. The church in which this gospel arose appears to have been
materially well-off - judging by the way in which ethical and religious concerns
associated with monetary matters are treated.¹²⁴ That Matthew's gospel refers to
coinage no less than 29 times suggests he was speaking to an affluent audience
- bankers, merchants, and landlords, for it would have been the middle to upper
classes who would be familiar with such concepts. Most likely living in an
atmosphere of religious and social tension, in addition to being rife with

¹²¹ Matthew 4:12-17, NRSV.
¹²² Matthew 4:17, NRSV.
¹²³ Ched Myers and Richard Rohr, *Bias From the Bottom*.
¹²⁴ Matthew 18:23, 20:1, 22:15, 25:14, NRSV.
dissension, this Gospel's mandate to make disciples of all nations was apparently provoking hostile reactions from both Jews and Gentiles. Says Metzger, "The author of Matthew told this gospel story to meet the religious and moral needs of this multiracial, prosperous, yet divided and persecuted church." In its chapters, Jesus is set forth as Israel's Messiah in whom God's purpose culminates and by whose words and life his followers, the true Israel, may gain divine forgiveness and fellowship. In this gospel, the accounts of Jesus' work and words are arranged in a biographical order: Birth of Jesus (chapters 1-2); Activity of John the Baptist (3:1-12); Baptism and temptation of Jesus (3:13-4:11); Jesus' preaching and teaching in Galilee (4:12-18:35); Journey to Jerusalem (chapters 19-20); Jesus' last week (chapters 21-27); The resurrection and Jesus' commission to his disciples (chapter 28). Within this framework the accounts of what Jesus said or did is grouped according to subject matter. The five discourses of Jesus, a noteworthy feature of this Gospel, are collections of teachings on specific themes: The Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7); Instructions for missionary disciples (chapter 10); the parables on the kingdom of God (chapter 13); Discipleship, or, words on the church as a community (chapter 18); and Jesus' thoughts on religious hypocrisy and the end of this age (chapters 24-25).

125 Matthew 13:21, 24:10, 7:15, 24:12, NRSV.
Given the author's Jewish identity, some scholars believe that at least the Gospel of Matthew was first written in Aramaic – the common spoken language throughout the Middle East at the time of Jesus, and most certainly the tongue in which he expressed his teachings. "Jesus' gospel of the kingdom and his movement, which spread throughout Palestine, cannot be understood without a thorough knowledge of Judaism and its Semitic background. These two religious movements did not develop along parallel lines from two distinctive sources of thought; one derives from the other. The Jewish customs embodied in biblical culture and common to all Semitic people connect the gospels with the Hebrew Scriptures," says Errico.128 Born and reared among Semitic people, their customs, manners, and language played an important part in Jesus' life and teaching. As a Jew, the lens through which Jesus viewed the world was circular, not linear. And so, it would have been in the nature of Semitic language that when he spoke, it is likely that one would discover that his was not a worldview of dichotomies, but rather of relatedness. "The arbitrary borders found in Greek between 'mind,' 'body,' and 'spirit' are not present in Aramaic which instead has a fluid and holistic view of the cosmo," Klotz offers. "Unlike Greek, Aramaic does not draw sharp lines between means and ends, between inner quality and outward action. Both are always present."129 Like Hebrew and Arabic, Aramaic expresses many layers of meaning within a very simple written language. But those few words embrace a wealth and depth of meaning unimaginable to a

128 Errico and Lamga, Aramaic Light on the Gospel of Matthew, xxxi.
Western mindset. It only takes a few words of Aramaic to convey imagery with speech vivid and exaggerated enough to expand the hearer's imagination, persuading him/her to see and consider more than one side of things. It is through its utter simplicity that the Aramaic language, though pithy, offers its stories poetic power enough to reveal the humor, passion, and great sorrow of the human condition.

The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount, "considered the blueprint of the Christian lifestyle pronounced by Jesus himself," and (for many scholar regardless of theological bias), the central statement/exposition of Christianity, comprises one of the most familiar texts in the entire New Testament. It is also one of the longest – covering three chapters and a significant breadth of audience and chronological time. These three chapters, among the most analyzed in the whole Bible, present a fresh view of the world. You will likely recognize many familiar sections, including the Golden Rule and the Lord's Prayer. Its long tradition of interpretation ranges from the classical "Interpreter's Bible" series to the pop-culture theology offered by the Rev. Dr. Robert Schueller in a video tape series entitled "The Be-Happy Attitudes." "The name 'Sermon on the Mount' designates the first programmatic speech Jesus delivered according to the gospel of Matthew. The text was used by Augustine (CE 354-430), who in his early

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commentary, most probably the first ever written on the Sermon on the Mount alone, highlighted the famous text as a literary entity in itself" says Freedman. Since then, these famous words of Jesus have been called by many names including "The Ordination Address to the Twelve," "The Compendium of Christ's Doctrine," "The Magna Charta of the Kingdom," "The Manifesto of the King," "Life Under the Reign of God," "The Law of Christian Society," "The Key to Success in Life," "The Twelve Blessings," and "The Yes's in Our No's."

The Sermon on the Mount is the first, and longest, of five major sections of Jesus' teachings provided by Matthew, and the most striking and characteristic feature of his entire gospel. All five sections conclude with the same formula, giving the impression of careful structuring. In fact, some scholars consider the choice of five to be a deliberate paralleling of the five books of Moses. A compilation of teachings of Jesus delivered at different times and places during his ministry, the sermon is made up of aphorisms, maxims, and illustrations which were remembered and treasured by those who followed him. Such a view does not rob any of the sayings of their meaning or authority. What it does is free the interpreter from trying to discover or having to construct a single audience for all the material.

Matthew's is essentially a teaching gospel; it is Matthew's characteristic that he collects the teaching of Jesus under great headings. A simple outline of

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132 Matthew 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1, NRSV.
the Sermon on the Mount would divide it into three sections: 5:1-20 — the Character of the Disciple; 5:21-7:6 — Examples of this character; 7:7-27 — Admonitions to pursue this character. While such a division is obviously simplistic, it focuses our attention on the central issue of the text. Contrary to some assumptions which have been made about the Sermon on the Mount, it is neither a stringing together of moral precepts, nor a means to crush us into recognizing the futility of the human condition, nor a picture of life in some far off kingdom age with no relevance for today. The Sermon on the Mount is not meant to be a new set of regulations for people to observe. It is not a new legal code. People didn’t need more rules to tell them how God wanted them to live. They had plenty already. The problem was that people, as illustrated by the history of Israel, consistently minimized or bent the rules in order to fit their interests. Jesus’ teaching was intended to expose and challenge this behavior. This seminal text, however, is not merely a new halakah, or law book. Rather, it is a whole new Torah, or teaching tradition, which deals with right action in the widest sense of the word. An attempt to describe the transformation experience that should happen in an encounter with God, this discourse, put at the forefront of the Gospel, underscores the point of Matthew’s theology: the Sermon on the Mount exposes the need for a righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.\footnote{Matthew 5:20, NRSV.} In these words, Jesus called for a new heart, and offered a picture of what the inner character, the moral life, of his followers would look like if they were shaped and formed by the character of God.
Presenting Jesus as decidedly Jewish, it contains no trace of what we know from contemporary (e.g. Q or Paul) or later New Testament sources as Christian theology. In fact, one of the near consensus positions of the Jesus Seminar is that Jesus did not speak of himself as the Son of God or any of the other titles that came to be applied to him after his death. Jesus put the focus on God as, in Tillich's words, "the ground of our being" – as immanent in creation – and on the Kingdom of God instead of himself.\textsuperscript{134} Freedman writes:

Conspicuous is the absence of the kerygma of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, even in places where one would expect it. Jesus has no salvific function apart from the obedience to the Torah that he teaches through his commandments and sayings. His eschatological function is understood entirely in Jewish terms as the advocate for his faithful in the Last Judgment. Because of this role, Jesus is able to pronounce the beatitudes in the here and now.\textsuperscript{135}

In other words, nowhere in the texts of the \textit{Sermon on the Mount} does Jesus present himself as "savior of the world," nowhere does he intimate a foreknowledge of his life or death as a salvific event, an idea that Rohr identifies as "recent, protestant, American, individualistic language and interpretation."\textsuperscript{136} To the contrary, the Jesus of the "\textit{Sermon}" instructs of salvation which comes through an intimate relationship with a particular kind of God whose characteristics of mercy, love, and justice, when embodied by believers, form the basis of a salvation expressed most vividly through the personhood of Jesus. It is in this context of a saving God, and a uniquely spiritually endowed

\textsuperscript{134} Marcus Borg, \textit{Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time}, 29 and 42; see also Paul Tillich's, \textit{The Courage to Be}, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952.
\textsuperscript{136} Meyers and Rohr, \textit{Bias From the Bottom}. 

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person/prophet, that Freedman suggests that Jesus taught both the present realities of God's rule and its future realization; indeed, his very life brought the dawning of the kingdom of God. Rohr says, "The Christ is the one who liberates them to live in this new way...as an alternative to the rest of society."\textsuperscript{137} Although some elements of the kingdom would not appear until the very end, other aspects of God's reign were present immediately in Jesus. The *Sermon on the Mount*, then, can be classified in the genre of "inaugurated eschatology."\textsuperscript{138} For believers, then, an experience of the kingdom – the promise of the future - was a possibility in the here and now.

**Parallels in Translation**

The table of parallel translations (Appendix 2) illustrates how various people, or groups of people, have translated the *Beatitudes* – sometimes in very different ways, depending on the text they translated from, and the intent of message they wished to be heard. For example, the *King James Version*, *NRSV*, and *The Message* are all translated from the Greek, and the material of Douglas-Klotz and Lamsa from the Aramaic. The translations from the Greek were intended to follow both the letter and the spirit of the Greek text, except for *The Message*. In an attempt to make the Bible more readily accessible to the average person, this translation was offered in modern language intended to echo the rhythm and idioms of the original Greek and Hebrew in street language.

\textsuperscript{137} Rohr, interview.

\textsuperscript{138} Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 130.
and idioms of today. The Douglas-Klotz material, in the tradition of Middle Eastern and Hebraic mysticism, illustrates that the multiplicity of translations from Aramaic require people to participate for themselves in the creation of meaning for the text, and contrasts possible meanings of Aramaic with the very different worldviews and meaning of Greek. Which one is correct? Perhaps they all are.

There are many reasons why we have problems translating the gospel of Matthew with any certainty. For one thing, in dealing with issues of translation, we must first remember that none of the original manuscripts of the New Testament have survived nor, presumably, any direct copies of the original manuscripts. What we have are copies of copies – which, presumably, have been significantly altered from the original writings. To begin with, the copies made in ancient times were handwritten. Consequently, even from the most serious scribe, into these copies errors would have crept. In addition, “corrections” were sometimes made by copyists, and additional material was included, thus tempering or reconstructing a theological message. In those days, the only Bible of the early church was the Old Testament. The gospels and epistles were still un-canonized. And so, it was not imperative to copy them exactly word for word. No manuscript can be better than that from which it was copied. So how does one determine the value of a manuscript? Since the publication of Bengel's study of the New Testament in 1734, a classification for ranking texts, textual criticism, was conceived. According to Throckmorton:

Textual criticism has shown that manuscripts, like animals, can be classified into families. When determining a text’s value, one looks first at how good the family is, and second, how accurate is the copy or text at hand? The
family is far more significant than the manuscript, and one manuscript copied from a good family gives far more support to a reading than a hundred manuscripts, no matter how accurately copied, from a poor family which as a family is late or inaccurate.\textsuperscript{139}

While textual criticism is an ongoing evaluation, many scholars concur that the differences in passages amount to a very small percentage, and do not affect basic doctrine of Christianity. They have determined that ninety percent of New Testament manuscripts are in agreement with one another.

Secondly, there are scholars who concur that understanding Matthew's gospel requires a basic understanding of Aramaic. Greek versions of the gospels – such as the King James Version – simply cannot adequately express Semitic thought. Aramaic is one of the world's most ancient languages, and one of the richest and most expressive languages of the Semitic group. Compared with Greek and Latin, however, and very much like Hebrew, it has a small vocabulary. This limitation of words made necessary the use of the same words with various shades of meanings.\textsuperscript{140} As many words are written and pronounced alike, difference in meaning is discerned only through context. Adding to the grammatical difficulty, in Aramaic, like other Semitic languages, a single dot above or under a letter radically changes the meaning of a word. And many factors - from human error in transcription to environmental conditions – can alter these tiny dots. For example, sometimes it may be difficult for the scribe to determine if a dot placed above one letter was really intended to be placed under

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{139} Throckmorton, \textit{Gospel Parallels}, xii.
\bibitem{140} Lamsa, \textit{The Modern New Testament}, xxiv.
\end{thebibliography}
a letter in a previous line. In addition, sometimes humidity affects the ink, making it impossible to determine the intended placement of dots with any certainty. Translation, then, becomes a kind of educated guessing game. The best translators are required to have intimate knowledge of the original language. But even if the translator speaks the language from which he or she translates, the meaning and usage of some words from one language to another still rest on his or her professional judgment and personal bias.

The Bible was conceived in the minds of Semitic prophets and written primarily for the guidance of their people. And so, many of the customs and manners from the ancient world that the text addresses are inconceivable to the present. The changes between then and now are alien to so much of the biblical customs and ways of thinking, and vice versa, and are a particular issue in translation. The way meaning is communicated in language is very complex. All languages of the world, both ancient and modern, have idioms, metaphors, and mannerisms of speech. This style of speech is called colloquialism, and it means that there are words and phrases particular to a language that, when translated into another tongue, would either lose their meaning completely or otherwise be obscured. This is because when we use an idiom we say one thing, but we mean another. The Sermon on the Mount, like much of the New Testament, is full of images and customs that need to be understood in light of Jesus’ culture. Says Lamsa, “Jesus followers were not startled when they heard him speak in idioms and metaphors and hyperbole, for they understood that he was speaking figuratively. They were no more surprised when they heard him say, ‘if thy right
hand offend thee, cut it off’ than Americans would be if they should hear a man
speak of someone being ‘in the dog house.’”141

Proper application of the teachings of Jesus requires a sense of what a
particular image or custom meant in Jesus’ day. For example, most North
Americans today use salt only to flavor food. But in Jesus’ day, it was also used
as the means of preserving food, keeping it from spoiling. That lends a different
twist to the picture of Jesus’ disciples as the “salt of the earth.” Also at issue is
deciding which teachings were meant to be understood literally and which
figuratively. “Hyperbole, a common manner of speaking in Jesus’ culture, uses
exaggeration to grab attention and make a point,” says Coleman.142 Making an
extreme, absolute statement allowed Jesus to demonstrate a strong contrast with
the prevailing opinion. In this manner, the hearer is forced to consider a new way
of thinking about things.

Clearly, it is a tremendously difficult, and some may say impossible, task
to help a person whose own language originated from Greek and Latin, to fully
comprehend the character of an ancient, middle-eastern one. English is a
cognitive language: flat and linear, it is known in the head. Conversely, Aramaic
is a multi-layered language, one that simultaneously expresses a mind/body/spirit
reality. In his own translations, Dr. George Lamsa studied the science of sound
and letters common to the Middle Eastern mystic tradition. He found that Aramaic

142 Coleman, Sermon on the Mount: Examining Your Lifestyle, 11.
contains "sound-meaning, that is, there is a body-resonance in the language, in which one can discover movement and meaning in the sound certain words make when spoken. These words convey states of meditation and awareness that must be experienced, not just studied intellectually." Over the last twenty years, Neil Douglas-Klotz's work has been about the task of explaining to the uninitiated but interested the particulars of Aramaic, woefully incomplete and underserved by verbal explanations alone. Essentially, he believes that traditional exegesis is inadequate to the task of interpretation and hermeneutics of sacred text precisely because the ancient languages of the East are multi-layered. Leading an international movement called the Universal Dance of Peace, Douglas-Klotz sought to engage participants in the process of discerning the deep meaning of scripture through a mind/body/spirit experience.

Douglas-Klotz believes that engaging one's inner recesses for such a task as this requires one to examine the ancient text in question from three, distinct, points of view:

1. Literal meaning: what is the face value of the words in question;

2. Metaphysical: how does the statement present a metaphor for our lives or the life of the community; and

3. Universal/mystical: challenges us to discover, "What is evoked in me when I hear this?"143

To engage these three questions, Douglas-Klotz approached the words of Jesus as a translator and a teacher of native mysticism. He developed a series of dances that offer a multi-sensory/multi-disciplinary engagement of chant, movement, and meditation, for both group settings, and individual practice. It is his hope that this discipline of deep reflection and movement – an experience of words through sound and feeling - will enable people to tap into the energy of the Universe, revealing a mystical interpretation. Unlike translations about mysticism; these dances are intended to be themselves an experience of mysticism. By initiating a personal experience of the sacred, like the one that Jesus seems to have had in the desert, the dances become mediators of the wisdom of God - a wisdom that is already within us - and move participants into a higher order of praxis, thought, and sense of being. Holistic engagement of ancient text is one way to encourage a profound revelation of meaning. For Douglas-Klotz, such revelation has the potential to pull us into the deep wounds of the human condition and the earth community as a whole. Once we are there, we are capable of embracing an experience of connection with the rest of the Universe and with that which created it all, and prepared to announce a new direction and a new truth.

Finally, parallels to the *Sermon on the Mount* can be found in the Gospel of Luke 6:20-40: passages commonly referred to as *The Sermon on the Plain* (Appendix 2). Falling into a similar literary category, using much of the same tradition, and showing a similar arrangement in composition, nonetheless, as shown in the table of parallel translations, there are differences between the two
texts. To a great extent this can be attributed to the fact that in scripture, audience often determines the theology of the material's context and content. Matthew's "Sermon" was written for a Jewish-Christian audience. Luke's addressees were more than likely gentile Christians. While both show dependency on ideas from the teachings of Jesus, both authors convey particular theologies. The Sermon on the Plain, with its four beatitudes, concerns itself with the discipleship of Jesus in terms of Greek education. In this text, the ethics of Jesus is learned as a way to realize one's humanity and as a means of survival in an evil and dangerous world. Contrasting the Pharisees' criticism of many aspects of Jesus' behavior with the favorable reaction of the twelve disciples, the Sermon on the Plain enunciates Jesus' values. Lacking any significant eschatological tone, it is Jesus' startling central ethical demand to love one's enemies that give these passages their most notable feature, forming the basis for the rules of Christian education. In contrast, eschatology is at the heart of Matthew's eight beatitudes. "Where Luke is telling us to be poor, Matthew's gospel is telling us to be just to the poor," says Rohr. The "ethics of the kingdom" in Matthew, which Jesus taught with divine power and authority, makes possible a new existence for those whose attitudes are attuned with God.

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144 Meyers and Rohr, Bias From the Bottom.
Word Study of the Beatitudes

The Beatitudes pronounced by Jesus become well-remembered clues to his entire legacy, and define the characteristics that are to be found in every child of God. Written in a Semitic poetry form called Synonymous Parallelism, the same basic statement for each blessing is made with parallel lines, using the same sentence structure but with different words. Every beatitude begins by defining the character of those who are members of the kingdom of God, and then moves to the reward such a person can expect, rewards that have both a present and future fulfillment.

Blessing: The Greek word makarios, describes a joy that is serene, self-contained, and completely independent of the chances and changes in life. In Hebrew, the word is ashere: a congratulatory exclamation that means, “Oh the blessedness of...,” referring to a happiness that results from positive action. In Aramaic, tubwayhun is a state of being in which one is properly aligned.

Poor in Spirit: Greek, ptochos means abject and absolute poverty. It describes the person who has nothing at all, a poverty in which one is beaten to their knees. In Hebrew, the word is ani or ebion: those who live in humble dependence on God, rather than an idealistic notion of the supposed simplicity of poverty. In Aramaic, meskenaeel offers an image of lacking a solid resting place. Spirit, or ruhah (Hebrew)/rukha (Aramaic) is the breath that links us to life.

Mourn: In Aramaic, the word lawile means a deep longing for something to occur. The Greek pentheo means to call to the side of. The strongest word
for mourning in the Greek language, it is used for mourning for the dead. The
Hebrew, avelim means accepting one's own sorrow with a desire to learn from it,
whether that sorrow be from recognition of one's own failings or the kind of
suffering experienced from the failing of others. In addition, it means to engage in
the sorrow of another – accepting it as fully as if it were your own.

*Meek:* In Greek, *praus* or *praotes*, was one of the great Greek ethical
words. Similar to "the poor in spirit," it defines lives marked by humble
mindedness. *L'makikhe*, in Aramaic, would also mean to humble or soften that
which is hard within.

*Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness:* hunger akin to starvation, and
the thirst of utter dehydration. In Greek, righteousness is *dikaios*, in Aramaic,
*khenuta* is an inner and outer sense of justice.

*Merciful:* In Greek, *eleemon* denotes the kind of sympathy that comes
from an intentional identification with another, until one can see and feel things
as the other sees and feels them. In Hebrew, *chesedh* is untranslatable, but its
essence is marked by a deliberate act of compassion and kindness toward those
who do not deserve it, giving to those to whom one is not expected to give at all.
*Lamrahmane* from Aramaic meant both "womb" and "compassion."

*Pure in heart:* In Greek, *katharos* (pure) means clean, unadulterated, and
unmixed. In semitic thought, the word *dadkeyn* is "consistent." "Heart," or
*lebhon* includes the mind as well as the emotions, and could mean "those who
are right with God."
**Peacemakers:** In Semitic thought, the word is *shalom*, or *shlama*, meaning surrender, and in Greek it is *eirene*. In all cases, “peace” means more than just the absence of strife. It is the task of reconciliation which allows for personal and corporate well-being in the widest sense of the word.

**Kingdom of God** The Greek, *basilea ton ouranon*, means “rule” or “reign” as well as “realm” of God: something a state one lives under and moves into. In Hebrew, *malkuth hashamayim* means a new order; a state of peace, fullness, and justice known through one’s recognition of their need for God. In Aramaic, *malkutha dashmaya* is the home for the Universe: that which makes “oneness” knowable. In both Hebrew and Aramaic, it is common to substitute the word “heaven” for “G-d” (a name which cannot be spoken), so as not to make common a use of the word for “G-d.”

**Conclusion**

The exegetical method provided an analysis which allowed data to be gathered about the *Beatitudes*. Sorting out the relevant and pertinent material in order to make a hermeneutical statement or statements, that is, a statement of meaning about the text for the community of that day and of our day, this process positions us to address the following crucial questions in Chapters Six through Eight:

- What light do the Beatitudes shed on God?
• What light do they shed on the community then and the community today?

• What are their promises?

• Do the Beatitudes share threads of common principles with ecology?

• Do they offer any grounds for hope toward the environmental issues of our time?

• What demands do they make on the individual and the community then and the community today?

This analysis is grounded in the belief that any text in the Bible never concerns the past only. Instead, through that text, the medium of the revelation of God continues to work and to speak in the present. In other words, revelation is never simply the conveying of new information about God. Rather, as the remaining chapters will reveal, revelation is the creation of a new situation, an event which brings about a changed life and circumstance.
CHAPTER SIX:

THE BEATITUDES - AN INTERPRETATION

Introduction: Hermeneutics – The Theory of Interpretation

By now it should be abundantly clear, even for scholars, that one does not “emerge” from a text with a pure meaning, gathered from within, as one might take something out of a bag. One must first “get into” the text, with questions that are not always those of its author, from a different horizon of experience, which may have significant repercussions on the production of meaning that constitutes a reading. “We have already seen that any reading can only be a rereading of the meaning of a text...every reading is a hermeneutic act, whether it is a reading of the Bible or of any other sacred or non-sacred text,” says Croatio.\(^{145}\) As was discussed in Chapter Five, fruitful exegesis requires responsive listening, that is, genuine dialogue with the text in which one reflects, asks questions of the text and makes demands of the text. But the exploration of the meaning of a text is not reducible to a purely literary, academic effort. Therefore, in order to grasp the spirit and feeling of the text, we must now engage in the process of hermeneutics.

\(^{145}\) Croatio, 67.
Hermeneutics (from hermeneuein, the Greek word for 'to interpret'), may be defined as the theory of interpretation. Both a science and an art, it is the procedure by which certain logical principles are applied to a document in order to ascertain the author's original meaning. This process began with F. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and his attempt to gain meaning through understanding the mind of the author. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur took this process a step further when he developed his "hermeneutic of suspicion" which represents his attempt to retain both science and art while disallowing either an absolute status. He stated, "Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigor, vow of obedience."\(^{146}\) This "hermeneutic of suspicion" clears the horizon for a more authentic word, for a new invention of an art of interpreting. In other words, it unmasks a false consciousness, a false understanding of the "text" by systematically applying a critique of suspicion, with the result that the true understanding, one that more faithfully tracks and correlates with the real situation, now becomes unmasked and revealed. As was true for the exegetical investigation of Chapter Five, to approach a text with suspicion, to query whether what the text appears to say really does correspond with its true message, is both a valid and necessary hermeneutical process. Ricoeur reminds us that we must approach the text critically and suspiciously in order that its message may truly be heard, and so that our own pre-understandings and certainties do not mask the truth.

All literature is subject to hermeneutical analysis. Sacred hermeneutics is the science of Biblical interpretation. More precisely, biblical hermeneutics inquires into the conditions under which the interpretation of biblical texts may be judged possible, faithful, accurate, responsible, or productive in relations to some specified goal. Whereas exegesis involves laying out the actual context for interpretation, biblical hermeneutics moves into interpretation and beyond. It entails a study of method, inviting reflection on the nature, methods, and goals of biblical interpretation. It also draws on general hermeneutic theory, that is, on traditions of scholarship – within philosophy, the social sciences, theories of literature, and semiotics – that shed light on questions about meaning and understanding. The subject embodies a proper concern to understand the biblical writings not only as particular historical documents of the past, but also as texts that address the present with a living and transforming voice.

This hermeneutic process is part of the very message of the bible. Croatio offers, “The theologoumenon of a ‘closed revelation,’ a revelation over and done, in spite of all its good intentions, and indeed all the truth it contains as a symbolic expression, produces a ‘short circuit’ in the revelation process itself. It seeks to move directly from God to word, instead of God to event to word...What is crucial is that God's self-revelation to us takes place in events.”147 To lay claim, then, to ‘fixing’ its meaning once and for all at the moment of its production is to deny its open meaning. But, how does a message expressed in another age, for a people of another culture and social milieu, become effective in our time and

147 Croatio, 74.
place? It is by applying the laws of linguistics of discourse, and by recalling the process of the event-becomes-word, that a meaning unfolds in the biblical text—
a meaning that overflows from its first referent. Thus we emerge upon a newness of meaning, characteristic of any hermeneutic reading, and particularly evident in all religious traditions. The movement of hermeneutics can never come to an end. For behind it is the presence of God in life—“a God of the living, and not of the dead.”¹⁴⁸

A Revolution in Consciousness

As the research in Chapter Four illustrated, the Bible and the interpretations of its morals and values have influenced the way many Americans view the environment. Biblical passages have been used to support less than beneficial responses to the environment, including ideas that nature is corrupt or imperfect, that humans have a right to dominate other species, and that the world is coming to an end and therefore not worthy of concern. At the same time they can affirm that Creation is good and a blessing, that the diversity of life on Earth is intentional and is in accordance with God’s purposes, and that humans have an obligation to act responsibly toward it. As was discovered, many traditions are “bound” by scripture in that they often use it to support intellectual and denominational positions. In addition, people often use scripture for education: to teach about what is right and what is wrong. But these are not just educational

¹⁴⁸ Matthew 22:32, NRSV.
documents to feed the intellect – to give answers about what is true and false, right and wrong. Says Rohr:

Pivotal to understanding the unique character of Jesus’ new world order is to know that his new alternative is not just another religious culture. As opposed to a religious culture, which is always using God for cultural purposes of control and manipulating people through religious imagery, the Reign of God disallows both possibilities. This is the difference between the True Sacred and what we might call the false sacred. The false sacred can always be spotted because it is always self-serving and other-destroying.149

The theologian Walter Brueggeman suggests that the essence of a prophetic vocation is the proclamation of an alternative consciousness which can puncture the myth of how we live so that we can believe in another way. Of course, the more you have to protect (reputation, theology, power/money, and righteousness), the less accessible you are to freedom. Why? Because freedom insists that we must take responsibility for one’s self, decisions, and life journey. It says that you will be called to go in places that you may not want to go. If that is freedom, most people don’t want it. But that is exactly what the word of God is intended to do: offer an alternative consciousness.

Chapter Five explored how Jesus’ own spirituality lay within what we know of as Jewish mysticism. In the tradition of Moses, Elijah, and the prophets of Israel, Jesus was a “spirit person,”150 one who had a sense that there was more to this life than the tangible world of our ordinary experience. He came to this consciousness through a personal experience of the sacred, suddenly knowing

149 Rohr, interview.
150 Borg, Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time, 30.
that which he hadn’t before. And like other Spirit persons, through that experience of the reality of Other, he became a mediator of the sacred, a teacher of Wisdom - of an alternative consciousness. Jesus’ spirituality puts the emphasis on “immediate awareness of relation with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine Presence,” says the Quaker scholar Rufus Jones.\textsuperscript{151}

Living a faith at its most acute, intense, and living stage, Jesus was not just a person who believed strongly in God, but one who knew God as a gracious and womblike reality, rather than as enforcer and source of requirements.

Wisdom concerns how to live.\textsuperscript{152} An alternative consciousness, it holds the lessons of the “road less traveled.”\textsuperscript{153} Similar to other sages who also questioned and undermined conventional wisdom,\textsuperscript{154} Jesus spoke of two ways of being: the broad way and the narrow way, the way of bondage, and the way of liberation.\textsuperscript{155} In his teaching, Jesus advocated for the narrow way which led to an authentic life.\textsuperscript{156} Using aphorisms and parables, he engaged the imagination and invited his listeners to see in a radically new way a different understanding of life – a change of perception which absolutely came out of his own spiritual

\textsuperscript{154}Marcus Borg speaks of Lao-tzu who spoke of following “a way” that led away from conventional values and toward living in accord with the Tao itself, and the Buddha’s teaching of the “eightfold path”, leading from a world of convention to enlightenment and compassion in \textit{The God We Never Knew}, San Franscisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.
\textsuperscript{156}Matthew 7:13-14, NRSV.
experience. For example, during the time of Jesus' teaching, conventional wisdom was interpreted almost exclusively through the Book of Leviticus, particularly the Law of Holiness. That interpretation (the "broad way") is characterized by: 1. Obeying the law, literally; 2. ritual observance of cult; and 3. keeping one's group and group symbols pure. Rohr says, "In those days, sinners were clearly defined by the Levitical Law of Holiness. In those days, you were either a sinner or not a sinner, and everybody knew which one you were. If you were not able to follow the purification rules, the debt codes, and the purity codes, you knew you were a sinner and others did, too. It was an objective category more than a subjective accusation." Now, although Jesus was a loyal Jew and accepted the authority of the Torah, it was precisely because of this position that the points on which he took issue stood out boldly as radical critique of the religious community with which it was assumed he identified. Although the written word was important, to Jesus, it was the great fundamental principles within the word that took precedence and provided the standard by which it is to be interpreted and applied. Jesus came to understand that any way of life based on authoritative teaching or law has a tendency to hypocrisy. These codes of shame and honor bound people into doing what was expected, and were the rules that shaped people's lives. In such a worldview as this, exclusion and inclusion issues were absolutely central to the Law of Holiness. But in his Sermon, Jesus interprets the Mosaic law in terms of the God whom he

has met, the God of compassion and mercy.\textsuperscript{159} For Jesus, his experiences of meeting this liberating God allowed him to proclaim a gospel of principles that were above and beyond the confines of law. Discounting much of the world of his time, Jesus insisted that relationship reality was above ritual reality, and that people were more important than ideology.

Wisdom teaches that the path of transformation is a journey away from the world of conventional wisdom,\textsuperscript{160} to a life centered in God that is predicated on two things: A new heart, and the way of death.\textsuperscript{161} Like the prophets before him, Jesus understood the heart as representative of the self at its deepest level. Centered in the finite, it becomes closed. But, centered in the infinite, it becomes open and receptive. In the wisdom tradition, a new heart meant an internal transformation brought on by a deep centering in God. The role of death was to initiate this inner movement of heart-felt belonging. Death is a striking image for the path of spiritual transformation, but a necessary one. Says Kubler-Ross, "Death...is identical to what happens when the butterfly emerges from its cocoon...Dying is only moving from one house into a more beautiful one."\textsuperscript{162} Only by dying to the world of conventional wisdom as the center of one's security

\begin{footnotes}
\item[159] Matthew 5:17-20, NRSV.
\item[160] Note: the dominant consciousness of any culture concerns the way things are and they way things ought to be, it provides guidance for how to live and is based upon the dynamic of rewards and punishments – you will reap what you sow, with social and psychological consequences. Socially it creates a world of hierarchies, psychologically it becomes the basis for identity and self-esteem; it creates a world in which we live, it is a world of comparisons in which we judge ourselves and others by how well we measure up. See John Dominic Crossan, \textit{Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography}. SanFrancisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994, 102-120; John J. Heaney, ed. \textit{Psyche and Spirit}. New York, Paulist Press, 1984, 31-49.
\end{footnotes}
and identity, and to the self as the center of one's concern, can a truly new path open up. "As we pass through this form of transition, we approach an unforgettable life changing experience...This is called cosmic awareness. In its presence we are surrounded by total understanding, compassion, and absolute unconditional love," continues Kubler-Ross.\textsuperscript{163} It seems that most spiritual people, who have had a direct and personal experience with the "Other," come to understand that the path of death is the path to new life. "Every age that is dying is simply a new age coming to life," said the Roman philosopher Boethius.\textsuperscript{164} So also was it true for Jesus, who discovered in the wilderness that such a path as death is a requirement for rebirth, for a resurrection to a life centered in God. This way of life is life in the Spirit. It is the life that Jesus himself knew. Says Rohr, "Jesus seems to be saying that God is not a philosophical system, a theory to be proved or an energy to be discussed or controlled, although we have often reduced God to such."\textsuperscript{165} Instead, Jesus' guiding vision seems to be leading us on a path of letting go and rediscovery, to a God who refuses to be known apart from love.

The most consistent theme in the \textit{Sermon on the Mount} is the "Kingdom." Most historians agree that it is the centering point which radiates influence on all of the teaching of Jesus. Bulman offers, "Both the prophetic expectation of a this-worldly rule of justice and the apocalyptic vision of a future life in the

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, 60-61.
\textsuperscript{165} Rohr, \textit{Jesus' Plan}, 4.
heavenly kingdom are brought together in the symbol of the reign of God – the proclamation of which was the core message of the preaching of Jesus."\textsuperscript{166} Crossan adds, "What we are actually talking about, is power and rule, a process much more than a place, a way of life much more than a location on earth."\textsuperscript{167} And Mack concludes that "King/kingdom is an abstract representation of anthropos ('human being') at the highest level imaginable, whether of endowment, achievement, ethical excellence, or mythical ideal."\textsuperscript{168} Traditionally, Jews assumed the reign of God meant the exaltation and leadership of Israel over all the nations. But through his basic paradigm, Jesus undermines such nationalistic ideas. His kingdom would transform human social, religious, and political systems into a new way of justice and righteousness. But his "Kingdom" was neither nationally nor politically defined. Redefining where power is really at, Jesus is always saying, "It is not where you think!", and described his paradigm as a process of growth, transformation, change, surrender, and how false life is let go. For Jesus, his reign of God was, in reality, the presence of God: it was God as a revelatory and salvific presence to us. Rohr said that in the Wisdom tradition, the True Sacred, which is synonymous with the reign of God, is of an entirely different order and significance. On the level of experience, the True Sacred always reveals that:

\textsuperscript{167} Crossan, \textit{Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography}, 55.
God is One and for all. 
God is sovereign to any group ownership or personal manipulation 
God is available as a free gift and not through sacrificing another 
God needs no victims and creates no victims. 169

Jesus preached of a reign, or kingdom, of God that was a communal reality, slow to grow, known by its effects, and extended to those who were present to the message, an invitation out of their comfort zone and into a consciousness of providence, care, and accountability. This reality required one to be grounded apart from one's own ego, to accept an invitation to something else by living a new way. For Jesus, then, his basic paradigm is inherently about metanoia: a slow process of deep and abiding spiritual change, of conversion, of transformation. Not so much a learning as an unlearning, the Sermon on the Mount is a description of how consciousness and awareness is the context for a conversion that liberates us from culture; and calls people on to hope: for the ideal that life could work, and that it is possible to love one another and to love this earth. Movement into this “unknown” is metanoia, and the Sermon on the Mount describes how growth, transformation, and change allows us to let go of the false life: a turn away from the system and toward a new way of being.

The new way of being is the way of the Beatitudes. Through the language of paradox and reversal, Jesus shattered the conventional wisdom of his time, and reminded his listeners that true enlightenment, true happiness, was always an inside job. The Kingdom of God in the Beatitudes was not primarily a matter of believing in certain dogmas. For Jesus, they were illustrative of a movement

169 Meyers and Rohr, Bias from the Bottom.
of the soul that actualized radical changes in one's life – a movement of consciousness that would be known in hindsight and by its affects. In other words, Jesus did not offer the Beatitudes as a program one must follow in order to become a disciple, and he did not offer them as a prescription for the way of life pursued by those who are disciples. Rather, the Beatitudes were descriptive of a reality one will know only on the other side of transformation. Jesus knew that when the lives of people and society were in accord with the reign of God, a visible and tangible restructuring of relationships occurs, changes which might well bring them into opposition to the "kingdoms of this world." And so, when he taught that meekness and the poor in spirit are blessed in the way of the Kingdom, he offered a paradigm that the time of God's reign was a state of being. It wasn't somewhere else, nor was it alien or mystical. The Kingdom was among them, inside of them, around them. It was not for some future time, but rather it was here on the earth, even if they just did not see it. And what's more, they didn't need to earn it. It was already theirs. Rohr says that "all great spirituality is about letting go, and mirrors the paradox of life itself." To Jesus, the paradox was that we must detach from the passing and attach to the substantial, that many who expect to be in will be shut out, and vice versa. In the

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170 Rohr, interview.
172 Richard Rohr, Adam's Return, 19.
Beatitude way, God was not judge, but gracious and compassionate, in a world where everyone receives what they need.

The Beatitudes: An Interpretation

What follows is an original translation of the Beatitude Way from the Peshitta by Neil Douglas-Klotz: one possible way to translate Jesus' message. It is followed by an interpretation of the Beatitudes. Although I have chosen to highlight Douglas-Klotz's Aramaic translation in the interpretation, because I prefer it, I have sought assistance for the interpretation from commentaries that span a wide theological range, from the right to the left, whose exegetical roots are similar to the span offered in the table of parallel translations of Chapter Five. How can this wide-ranging linguistic and theological context provide a valid and accurate translation, true to the context of both Jesus' teachings and the Douglas-Klotz translation? Because, truly, almost all of the available interpretive material on the Sermon on the Mount is in agreement – with some exception occurring in scholars' understanding of where the Kingdom of God will be made manifest. Some scholars insist that the Kingdom of God is a purely metaphysical reality, and some place the Kingdom exclusively in an eschatological realm – a

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173 Matthew 6:26-29, NRSV.
174 Matthew 20:1-15, NRSV.
175 Douglas-Klotz, Prayers of the Cosmos, 47.
future time to come. But aside from the theological discrepancies of Kingdom understanding, the principles of the Beatitudes are — almost without exception — in general agreement across interpretations. Why, then, choose the Aramaic translation over one that is more familiar? For one thing, it is this researcher's opinion that what the Aramaic offers to an inquiry of the Beatitudes is an acknowledgement of the complexity of meaning inherent in the text itself, and therefore richness in interpretation, that may not be as readily identifiable in interpretations from the Greek. Thus, while the Aramaic translation of the principles of the Beatitudes often does not depart significantly from those of the Greek (in that the Greek understanding is often enfolded in the Aramaic), it does go further in exploring their depth, meaning, and application, and resonates, as it were, with the consonance of the integrity of the Universe, wherein all things are interrelated and interconnected as a single, sacred, community. Additionally, it is the particular gift of the emotional and poetic qualities of the Aramaic language which makes it more likely to be able to effectively open up one's romantic imagination. Engagement of one's romantic imagination at a deep level is necessary to communicate not only the power and reality of the Beatitude Way, but also to make a living of "the Way" a distinct possibility.178


178 Rohr, interview.
Tuned to the Source are those who live by breathing Unity, their “I can!” is included in God’s

Blessed are those in emotional turmoil, they shall be united inside by love.

Aligned with the One are the humble, those submitted to God’s will; they shall be gifted with the productivity of the earth.

Tuned to the Source are those who are those who long clearly for an inner and outer foundation of peace, they shall be embraced by birthing power

Blessed are those who, from their inner wombs, birth mercy; they shall feel its warm arms embrace them.

Aligned with the One are those whose lives radiate from a core of love; they shall see God everywhere.

Tuned to the Source are those who plant peace each season, they shall become fountains of Livingness.

Blessed are they who are dislocated for the cause of justice, their new home is the province of the Universe.

Aligned with the One are you when you are conspired against and driven away by the clamor of evil on all sides, for my sake,

Then feel at the peak of everything and let your ego disappear, for this is the secret of claiming your expanded home in the Universe.  

179 Douglas-Klotz, Prayers of the Cosmos.
In the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes extend and pronounce a blessing on those courageous enough to live its principles. The blessing is life in the “kingdom” and to get there requires:

- **metanoia**: where the myth of conventional wisdom gets punctured and your life gets reoriented;

- **childlikeness**: a countercultural posture that contains a truth of yourself beyond achieving, succeeding, and accomplishing and instead is about “being,” honesty, and spontaneity;

- **poverty**: simplicity, trustfulness, lack of self-accumulation; and the

- **suffering** of letting go of what you think is necessary, of trusting in life itself and not remaining in habits of fear.

As was illustrated in Chapter Five, given the Jewish nature of this material, to preface instruction of the Kingdom with blessing is as appropriate here as pre-facing the Ten Commandments with the recital of God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Such pronouncements were common in the Hebrew Scriptures. In other words, God’s imperative is couched in and surrounded by grace. The obedience demanded by the Beatitudes must be understood as response to, not an effort to gain, God’s favor. They do not describe how change occurs, but rather the change that has occurred as a result of a reorientation toward God. In addition, the beatitudes are not simple statements, nor are they condemnations; they are exclamations about right living. That is very important, for it means that

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180 Meyers and Rohr, Bias from the Bottom.
181 Exodus. 20:1-2, NRSV.
182 Psalms 1:1, 32:1, NRSV.
the beatitudes are not only pious hopes of what shall be; they are congratulations on what is, for to be “in the kingdom” is to be comforted, satisfied, obtain mercy, and see God. Even as the beatitude offers the promise of a future blessing, each pronounces an immediate one, too (i.e. blessed are...). The Interpreter’s Bible announces that the blessedness which belongs to the believer is not simply a blessedness which is postponed to some future world of glory; it is a blessedness which exists here and now, extended in the Gospel to the men and women of humility, love, trust, fidelity, and courage.”

The very moment one participates in the behavior, attitude, and/or spiritual state, Jesus declares in the beatitude, at that moment the blessing is received: it begins the movement of reciprocity from God to human and back again. Says Barclay, “The Beatitudes speak of a presence which seeks us through our pain, which sorrow and loss, grief and pain are powerless to touch, which shines through tears, and which nothing in life or death can take away.” It is not something into which the Christian will enter, it is something into which he or she has entered – which will find its fullness in the presence of God. Listen to the blessings:

_Tuned to the Source are those who live by breathing Unity, their “I can!” is included in God’s_  

_(Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven)_

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Some scholars believe that this is the root from which the other beatitudes grow, a key to everything the Jesus is teaching. This phrase does not refer to those who are poor in the material sense, although they may be, but to those who were humble and unassuming, who surrender to and acknowledge their need of God. It covers all who would recognize their need to learn, all who are content with simplicity, all who, in the time of Jesus, were the lowly and despised. Quite often, both in the Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament, the spiritually poor were literally poor as well, because their insistence on being faithful to God made them targets of oppression and exploitation by those who compromised God's standards for their own material gain. For instance, Isaiah 61:1ff, which serves as a background to the Beatitudes, announces the coming of God's deliverance to the Jewish exiles who were “lowly” (poor), “brokenhearted” (mourning), and “captives” in a hostile land (the meek). These are the people who live in humble dependence on God.\footnote{Psalm 34:6, NRSV.} It is not an idealistic notion of the supposed simplicity of poverty. Rather it is an outer reflection of a particular inner character. The price of truth can be very great. When you are “filled” by prestige or power, when you think you have something to prove or defend, you are more likely to feel that you are obligated to uphold and affirm that which you imagine gives you life. Jesus advocates for a social re-ordering, saying that those who live “outside the system,” who practice dependence on God, are the

\footnote{Interpreter's Bible, 280.}

\footnote{Psalm 34:6, NRSV.}
ones who are filled with what really matters. Their freedom - from self and from world – renders them open to receive the blessing.

A divine transformation of the human spirit is required for a proper understanding of this blessing. When one recognizes their spiritual bankruptcy and of their need to be transformed, they can then lay claim to an experience of the condition that this first beatitude insists upon. This is the doctrine of emptiness and simplicity. Blessing is upon the one who has realized their own utter helplessness, and who has put their whole trust in God. For Jesus, that person who is poor in spirit is the one who has realized that things mean nothing, and that God means everything. They exist in a place-space of peace, fullness, and trust in the embrace of all they are by All-That-Is.

*Blessed are those in emotional turmoil, they shall be united inside by love.*

*(Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted)*

Jesus announced that blessed is the one whose heart is broken for the world's suffering and out of recognition of their own sin, for out of their sorrow they will find the joy of God. Blessed are they that accept their own sorrow with a resolve to learn, and who voluntarily share the pain of their neighbor. Jesus does not announce this as a general blessing on those bereaved by the common tragedies of life that come to all people. Instead, it is offered to those who are in touch with the pain of the world caused by the pride, arrogance, and even evil of people who do not recognize their bankruptcy before God. The turmoil results
from a mourning over personal shortcomings and their consequence on others, the sin of the institutions of society and their effects as well, and our exile from “home.”

Grief is a complex but integral emotion and experience to the life in the Kingdom. Grieving keeps us out of the fixing mode and makes the way of blaming useless and counterproductive. When we mourn we are submerged into a world deeper than words or control, that unknown inner world most people avoid, where everything is not organized, efficient, productive, or positive. Grief confronts us where we are most vulnerable and where we often have little experience or knowledge. It is a way of hoping without specific plans, of believing without focusing on an idea.

Mourning is a mode of existence that agrees to carry the sadness of things without denying or dismissing the pain. It is a way of living that incorporates dying. It is not a maudlin, depressed, or self-pitying thing, but a way of “compassion,” of loving, that makes room for everything and holds onto nothing. It is a way of remembrance that refuses to forget. “No wonder Jesus names this mode blessed and promised comfort in his second description of happiness. Lamentation is a way out, a way through, a way into the holy mystery of things. It is the only human emotion that becomes the name of a book in the Bible,” said Rohr.187 When we own our personal brokenness, when we confess that we have betrayed our call to be faithful to God’s word and resolve to behave

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187 Rohr, Grief Quest, xiii.
in a new way, we are no longer controlled by these realities. To the depth and degree that we own the brokenness, to that same depth and degree we will experience the blessedness of God’s comfort and healing. When we are willing to face our own inner alienation from God we will experience the sense of wholeness and unconditional love at the heart of Kingdom peace and fulfillment.

*Aligned with the One are the humble, those submitted to God’s will; they shall be gifted with the productivity of the earth.*

*(Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth)*

Similar in meaning to the phrase “poor in spirit,” this beatitude involves a lifestyle marked by gentleness and humility – the same characteristics used to describe Jesus himself.\(^{188}\) A direct quote from the Psalms,\(^{189}\) here, the one who is blessed is the one who has the humility to know their own ignorance, their own weakness, and their own need. So, this blessing falls upon the one who has the acceptance of their necessity to learn and of their necessity to be forgiven, for while most would say that a loving person will forgive, Jesus says a forgiven person will know how to love.\(^{190}\) Of course, the irony concerning God’s gift of the earth is that despite the best efforts of those who grasp for the world, it will one day be given over to those who have demonstrated a life of meekness. “The reward comes as a gift and a legacy: it comes that way because the meek would

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\(^{188}\) Matthew 11:28-30, NRSV.

\(^{189}\) Psalm 37:11, NRSV.

\(^{190}\) Luke 7:39-47a, NRSV.
never seize it."⁹¹ True humility banishes all pride. It describes one's only proper attitude to God.

**Tuned to the Source are those who are those who long clearly for an inner and outer foundation of peace, they shall be embraced by birthing power.**

*(Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied)*

This is a demanding but also comforting beatitude, for the one who is blessed is not necessarily the one who achieves this goodness, but the one who longs for it with their whole heart. Hungry and thirsty people have only one passion: their entire energy is focused upon finding food and water. They will lay aside other pursuits in order to get these critical needs met. Likewise, people in the kingdom are marked by this same deep-seated, intense need, but theirs comes from focusing on knowing and living God's way.⁹²

If there was one supposed guarantee in Israel at the time of Jesus, it was that Scribes and Pharisees were going to be in heaven, even if the rest of the world didn't make it. They did all kinds of external righteous deeds that impressed people. But Jesus taught that people are not merely to *do the right thing*, but to be doing the right thing for the *right reasons*. External righteousness was not good enough. Although there were plenty of people with good reputations that had gained the respect of society, Jesus said that if their

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⁹¹ Interpreter's Bible, Volume IV, 283.
⁹² Psalm 42, NRSV.
righteousness did not exceed the scribes and Pharisees, they would not even enter the Kingdom.

The blessing itself is not righteousness, but rather comes from an intense desire for it. Jesus takes the intention for the deed, for in God's mercy, God judges us, not only by our achievements, but also by our dreams. Says Klotz, "When we long for and finally receive a sense of justice and a reestablishment of harmony, we often see the purpose of the hunger and thirst. It has created an inner sense of radiance and clarity: the letting go will have been for a purpose."193

_Blessed are those who, from their inner wombs, birth mercy; they shall feel its warm arms embrace them._

_(Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy)_

Just as righteousness is part of the very nature of God, so is mercy.194 To be merciful is a practice, an act of deliberate compassion and kindness toward others – especially those whom one believes do not deserve it. The Hebrew Scriptures instituted mercy through the provision of the Law of Jubilee, during which time all debts were to be cancelled, all slaves freed, and all land returned to the original owners.195 It was a picture for what “the year of the Lord” would

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193 Douglas-Klotz, _Prayers of the Cosmos_, 57; see also Psalm 17:15 “As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake I shall be satisfied with your likeness.”

194 Matthew 18:21-22, NRSV.

195 Leviticus 25:8-55, NRSV.
look like.\textsuperscript{196} “I believe with all my heart that mercy and forgiveness are the whole gospel...the experience of mercy is the experience of God who loves out of total gratuitousness,” says Rohr.\textsuperscript{197} Mercy focuses on the pain, brokenness, and misery that marks all of life as a result of sin, and seeks to do what it can to relieve those conditions. Mercy gives freely to those to whom one is not expected to give at all, and reflects a recognition of their own desperate need for God’s mercy for themselves.

And so, Jesus told the gathered that blessed is the one who gets right inside other people, until they can see with their eyes, think with their thoughts, feel with their feelings. This is a sympathy which is not given, as it were, from the outside, but which comes from a deliberate identification with the other person, just as God identifies intimately with them. McFague writes, “I have come to believe that the names of each person, species, creature, and element are superimposed over God’s name. God is reality; God is the source of reality of each of us. Panenthesism – seeing the world as in God – puts God’s ‘name’ first, but each of our names, though preserved in their distinctiveness, are included within the divine reality.”\textsuperscript{198} Mercy is who-God-is. And so, the principle within this beatitude that Jesus announced to his followers insists that because in deed and in truth they were all one, component parts of the same living Universe, their well-being was inextricably tied up with the well-being of others.

\textsuperscript{196} Isaiah 61:2, NRSV.
\textsuperscript{197} Rohr, \textit{Jesus’ Plan}, 136.
When mercy became their energy, their meaning, they would become Mercy themselves, because it would be the only thing that made sense to them.\textsuperscript{199} Jesus promised that at that moment, they would discover that the compassion they birthed out to others would return to them multiplied, and multiplied, and multiplied.\textsuperscript{200}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Aligned with the One are those whose lives radiate from a core of love; they shall see God everywhere.}
\end{quote}

\textit{(Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God)}

Jesus taught that blessed is the one whose motives are pure for that one will be able to see God.\textsuperscript{201} Demanding the most exacting self-examination, this beatitude seeks to know the context of one’s motives for every kind of encounter. Is work done from motives of service or from motives of pay? Is service given from selfless motives or from motives of self-display? Is religion a thing in which one is conscious of nothing so much as the need of God within their hearts, or a thing in which they have comfortable thoughts of their own piety? To examine one’s own motives is a daunting thing, for there are few things in this world that even the best of us do with completely unmixed motives. But the call for a thorough-going purity is a righteousness of mind and single-mindedness of motive, for no one can serve two masters.\textsuperscript{202} Jesus came to believe that when

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{199} Rohr, interview.
\item \textsuperscript{201} Psalm 24, NRSV.
\item \textsuperscript{202} Matthew 6:24-25, NRSV.
\end{footnotes}
every facet of one’s being is oriented from and toward a single-minded pursuit of Love’s way, that one will see God in the world around them when others are blind; will become aware of the movements of Divine Will in their lives even in the midst of pain; and, prompted by the love of All-That-Is, will have times of vision when the earth falls away.203 Jesus tells them that they will receive this blessing when they discover for themselves that Love is impartial, inclusive, consistent, and universal. Once love became their center, “they will see the movement of the cosmos through the soul of every living thing,” says Douglas Klotz.204

_Tuned to the Source are those who plant peace each season, they shall become fountains of Livingness._

_(Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God)_

“The dream of God is a vision of shalom, a Hebrew word often translated as ‘peace,’ but which also includes freedom from oppression, anxiety, and fear, as well as the presence of health, prosperity, and security. It offers a dream of a world in which such well-being belongs to everybody,” says Borg.205 In ancient Semitic thought, peace was never only a negative state; it never meant only the absence of trouble; it always meant everything which makes for one’s highest good. What is the work of peace? It is the task of reconciliation that moves with gentleness and pleads in love.

203 Interpreters Bible, 288.
204 Douglas-Klotz, 63.
205 Marcus Borg, _The God We Never Knew_, 134.
Jesus pronounces the blessing on the peace-makers, not necessarily on the peace lovers, for it very often happens that if one loves peace in the wrong way, they succeed in making trouble and not peace. Those who assume that peace “just comes” are simply peace-hopers. Therefore, this beatitude demands not the passive acceptance of things because we are afraid of the trouble of doing anything about them, but the active facing of things, and the making of peace, even when the way to peace is through struggle. True peace-making involves seeking heart to heart reconciliation between entities. It requires the rooting out of the causes of alienation, and the disciplined practice of attitudes and actions that truly work for harmony to take their place. It is the great purpose of God to bring peace between the created and the Creator, and between created and created. Jesus taught that there is no other way to peace, other than peace-making itself. This blessing reflects the practice of the presence of God. And so, blessed are those who produce right relationships, for they are doing a God-like work.

_Blessed are they who are dislocated for the cause of justice, their new home is the province of the Universe._

_(Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven)_

One of the outstanding qualities of Jesus was his sheer honesty. In this and the next Beatitude, Jesus presents a realistic picture of what his followers probably already knew: society does not easily tolerate the prophetic spirit.

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206 Rohr, interview.
When he spoke to the crowds, he was clear that he had come not to make life easy, but to make people great.\textsuperscript{207} He was also clear that he expected his followers to be persecuted, and more than likely was describing what had already begun to happen to the believing community. Not every persecution is here pronounced "blessed," however. For that, the motive must be right. But remarkably, Jesus blessed the persecution of those who would follow his call. As the actions of their transformed consciousness began to disrupt their work, social, and home life, he seems to be saying, "Don't be afraid to look beyond the boundaries of what you call home,"\textsuperscript{208} for adversity may be just what you need to take the next step on the path in the Kingdom. Although these last beatitudes confirm that when they work for justice, they would not be admired by "the system," Jesus assured them that when a believing community refuses to move from their loyalty to God, when they pursue God's way in contrast to conventional wisdom, when justice finds a home in their heart the potential of the Universe will open up to them and this blessing will be received.\textsuperscript{209}

\textit{Aligned with the One are you when you are conspired against and driven away by the clamor of evil on all sides, for my sake,}

\textit{Then feel at the peak of everything and let your ego disappear, for this is the secret of claiming your expanded home in the Universe}

\textit{(Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice, and be}

\textsuperscript{207} Barclay, 95.
\textsuperscript{208} Klotz, page 69.
\textsuperscript{209} Matthew 7; Psalm 1, NRSV.
exceedingly glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you)

Jesus' words touched the hearts of his disciples, followers, and people. But even some of them felt, as did many others, that he was too revolutionary, undermining ancestral, cultural, and long-held religious beliefs. He angered those who did not realize or accept what he was all about. In sending Jesus to the mountaintop, Matthew's message is clear: in some way, Jesus is the new Moses, re-proclaiming truth to power. Just as Moses gave the law on Mt. Sinai, Jesus reveals his messianic Torah: an understanding of Truth that emphasizes meekness, justice, peace, purity of heart, compassion, love of self, enemy and neighbor, and devotion to God's presence in the world. Pronouncing blessings on the poor, the humble, the mourners, the just, the compassionate, he taught his followers to practice the spirit of Torah. Through this Sermon, he brought the image of God to a new meaning. God was a loving presence now active in the world, in spite of the violence and inhumane conditions.

On the mountain top Jesus extends a welcome to those who have chosen a new life, to the necessity of going against much of what the world believes, to the narrow road,210 where persecution is a blessing. And he warns that as the essence of a prophetic vocation is the proclamation of an alternative consciousness, those who have punctured the myths of how they are to live are persecuted because their Spirit-filled and Spirit-led lifestyle and character will be in direct conflict and opposition to the lifestyle and character of the rest of the

210 Rohr, interview.

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world! He told them that the world in every age will always ask for all of their loyalty. But, a Kingdom person couldn’t give that anymore. Once God was understood as the ultimate reality, then the other systems of their world did not and could not exercise final voice in anything. “There is no more radical teaching or politics than the Kingdom. To those who have power and control, Jesus is always saying, ‘Come down.’ To those on the bottom, the unrelenting and consistent message is “Come up,” says Rohr. To those who would be followers, Jesus taught that out of recognition of their oneness with God, and the responsibilities that come with living out that consciousness, they must be prepared for persecution. However, the blessing received is that when they live in the Kingdom, the outcome expected in a life of presence is, at last, an eternal “at-homeness” with God.

Conclusion

Without a vision the people perish. Like many great spiritual Masters, Jesus’ vision was certain of one thing: presence. His was the message proclaimed by Annie Dillard when she wrote:

There is no less holiness at this time – as you are reading this – than there was the day the Red Sea parted, or the day in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as Ezekiel was a captive by the river Chebar, when the heavens opened and he saw visions of God...There is no less might in heaven or on earth than there was the day Jesus said, ‘Maid, arise,’ to the centurion’s daughter, or the day Peter walked on

211 Meyers and Rohr, Bias from the Bottom.
212 Proverbs 29:18, NRSV.
water...In any instant the sacred may wipe you with its finger: in any instant
the bush may flare...In any instant you may avail yourself of the power to
love your enemies; to accept failure, slander, or the grief of loss...213

Jesus had discovered for himself that ultimate reality, the luminous,
compassionate intelligence of the Universe was not somewhere else, in some
heaven, light-years away. It didn’t manifest itself any more fully to Abraham or
Moses than to his followers, nor would it be any more present to some Messiah
at the far end of time. It is always here, right now. “I AM” became Jesus central
vision, and the context for his core metaphor: the Kingdom of God.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presents his own “tale of two cities”:
the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of the world. The kingdom of the world
was a system of power and dominance. Fully supportive of conventional
wisdom, it punished those who dared to rebuke it. Conversely, the kingdom of
God was a way of relating that named reality in a new way. “The Kingdom, or
reign of God, is not the same as heaven. It is not eternal life, or where you go
after you die. It is clearly something that enters into this world, or, as Jesus put
it, is close at hand. It is a reality that breaks into this world now and then, when
people are like God.”214

When one chooses for their home the kingdom of God, the Beatitudes are
all the blessings and promises that they will receive, for to be in the kingdom is to
be comforted, to obtain mercy, to see God. But, they are also descriptions of

214 Rohr, Jesus’ Plan, 30.
those who have received the promises. Such people cleave to God in simple trust, are single-minded in their love for him. Although they are oppressed by the world they are merciful to others, and wherever they go, are the bringers and founders of peace. They are people who try to live a set of deeply held beliefs that actually function in their personal and public lives. Each of them struggle to discern God’s action in and through their lives and then to embody that reality in everything they did. As McFague has written:

As disciples of Christ they became mini-incarnations of God’s love...They are intimations of what it means to be ‘fully alive,’ living life from, toward, and with God. They fascinate because in them we see God and the human in intimate connection, human lives showing forth different facets of divine power and love...And as they focus on God’s work of helping to make all of us, every creature on the planet, fully alive...we can see that a few beliefs carefully thought through and actually functioning at personal and public levels, may be more significant than a comprehensive, systematic, but loosely embraced theology.215

Jesus clearly expects his teaching to be put into practice, right now. While both Judaism and Christianity ache with nostalgia for the future, Jesus seems to say that if we live it twenty-four hours a day, we will spend all our time working in anticipation and will never enter the Sabbath of the heart. “The messianic dream of the future may be humanity’s sweetest dream. But it is a dream nevertheless, as long as there is a separation between inside and outside, as long as we don’t transform ourselves. And Jesus, like Buddha, was a man who had awakened from all dreams.”216 As his followers pondered his words concerning what they


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were prepared to live, what beliefs were livable, and which ones would support
the flourishing of life, they came to understand that his vision was not a formless
ethical ideal, rather it was concrete and specific. He understood that they
couldn't change anyone else. All they could do was change themselves. But he
also came to believe that as his followers changed, everything around them
would change - it must change.

Jesus' "Beatitude Way" is descriptive of the other side of conversion: the
total transformation of a consciousness and worldview that characterizes one
who loves and is loved by God. Those whom he praises are men and women of
humility, love, trust, fidelity, and courage. Although they are not yet perfect, he
assures them that they are on the way: their interests and desires are turned in
the direction of the kingdom of God. And once they arrive, they will discover that
all along his message was simple: the love they long for in their innermost hearts
was already there.
CHAPTER SEVEN:

THE NARRATIVE CONNECTIONS

Introduction

The research of the previous chapters laid the foundation for an inquiry to determine whether or not the Beatitudes are inclusive of ecological principles and, if they are, whether or not one can apply the principles of the Beatitudes to the environmental issues of our time to affect positive change. Chapters Two and Three focused on ecological principles. Within this section, the research looked at some of the reasons why the dissemination of scientific information concerning the unhealthy state of the earth so far hasn’t been enough of an impetus to produce a measurable difference in people’s behavior in support of the planet. These chapters established that we are losing species and habitat at rates unparalleled in human history. Today, Earth’s life support systems – those that provide our clean air and fresh water, those that regulate our climate, those that provide us with occasions for beauty and inspiration, are being degraded. Today, there are many people who know what is at risk. Some have determined that they will take sustainable action to protect life – not because they are afraid, necessarily, but because they have come to see that it is the right thing to do. But there are others informed by these same facts that choose not to engage in long-term solutions. Science tells us that this is a problem. Unless more people
come to believe that what they understand to be at risk is fundamentally important to their quality of life, to the community of life, and make new decisions about how they will choose to live, this small planet we call home will continue to struggle. A sustainable future for the living earth will need to address questions of equity, justice, compassion, and choices between short-term and long-term needs. Moving people to change, though, will require more than negative rhetoric. It is clear that saving ourselves will revolve not around our ability to shock, but to inspire.217

Chapter Three looked at the many ways that people have talked about ecology and environmental issues over the years. This material explored how different kinds and usage of language can add new ways of communicating about and understanding ecological values. Here it was discovered that narrative can be as important in shaping one’s values about the choices we make for our lives as can facts. Our stories of origin and stories of the various characters and places that make up our lives are basic meaning-giving narratives. The ways we are taught to relate to one another and the earth, our ideas (or lack of ideas) about community, are often founded in the examples shared through story. Says Hitt:

Stories seduce people into examining their own experiences as they relate to these stories. What results is an explanation of the world not only grounded in literal occurrence, but customized to one’s own experience.

217 Berry, second interview.
The stories gather power by building cumulatively on the small truths of daily happenstance.$^{218}$

The stories we tell about the earth and each other mold and shape our desires, attitudes, and our basic vision of life – indeed they shape our character. Narratives are an integral part of understanding the communities in which we live. We are the people we are, in large measure, because of the stories which we have heard and been a part of.

With respect to language within narrative, Chapter Four looked at how theology and ethics can add dimensions of value and meaning to the otherwise technical discourse of ecology. Looking specifically at the interpretation and application of some Christian perspectives, this material gave examples of how Christian thought has influenced - both negatively and positively - the way people have lived with and valued the earth over the years. From this research it was clear that for some people, using religious language is problematic. Some have had experiences of people using religion to move an ecological issue beyond any possibility of reasoned discussion. Others assume, and rightfully so, that some people will use religion to invoke unquestionable authority to back an anti-ecological position. But for others, religious language has helped expand the boundaries of ecological discourse by introducing elements of value, meaning, and world-view to those of science. For them, language of ethics and cosmology have the power to evoke a shift in romantic imagination - the kinds of

responses needed to re-envision our responsibilities for earth-care. Daly and Cobb say that a sustained willingness to change depends:

...on a love of the earth that human beings once felt strongly, but that has been thinned and demeaned as the land was commodified...there is a religious depth in myriads of people that must be touched and tapped. If that is done, there is hope...Our point is that the changes that are now needed in society are at a level that stirs religious passions. The debate will be a religious one whether that is made explicit or not.219

They, and others, have found that, sometimes, religious language can not only help to clarify what is most profoundly at stake, but also to realize that their own deepest beliefs may be at odds with the actions that they themselves are promoting.

Understanding how our different perspectives shape the way we address and think about ecology can help us see our motivations for doing one thing over another. If we were to look just under the surface of any discussion involving how we have chosen to live in this world, we would be sure to find a collection of value-laden decisions. Our values are the lenses through which we judge the information that we receive. Since factual data – like the information that science has given us about the state of the planet - is interpreted and evaluated through the prism of our values, perhaps addressing the ethical dimensions of behaving in ways that better support the planet will make real and lasting change more likely. Vaclav Havel once said:

219 Herman Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future, Boston: Beacon Press, 1989, 373-375.
The basis of the new world order will mean nothing as long as this imperative does not derive from the respect of the miracle of being, the miracle of the Universe, the miracle of nature...Only someone who submits to the authority of the universal order and creation, who values the right to be a part of it and a participant in it, can genuinely value himself and his neighbors, and thus honor their rights as well.220

But can respect for all that is life be initiated from the “outside”? Can “submission to the universal order” be induced, say, by reading and implementing the lessons of a particular biblical text? Laying the foundation for this inquiry, Chapters Five and Six offered an exegete of the Sermon on the Mount in general, and the Beatitudes in particular, in an attempt to identify the ethical vein of the Beatitudes.

Chapter Seven builds on the work of the previous two. Here it will be determined whether or not the presence of ecological principles can be traced within the particular qualities of the Beatitudes - the practice of the values necessary to realize the actuality of God’s blessing.

Tracing Ecological Threads

Some people say that we are deep into a “Great Forgetting:” we are living in a time when our relationships, with one another and with the earth, are so fractured that we have almost forgotten why they were important in the first place. But there are those who prefer to hope that we are, instead, on the brink

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of a Great Remembering, a reawakening to a more authentic life - a time when we can reconsider what matters most to us. It seems that people in every time and land have long been called upon to consider what qualities constitute the good life. Aristotle once said that virtue is neither a passion, nor a faculty, but a state of character. This is so because neither emotions nor the capacity to feel them, as traits of the human condition, involve choice. On the other hand, virtues do involve choice – the choice to act excellently. He said, "Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it." It is the life of virtue that constitutes living well: knowing how to act "to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way." In other words, a moral virtue is an excellence of character, developed by conscious choices over time, for which one can and should be praised. In like manner and in more recent times, Hauerwas agreed that character was more than the sum of all we do. For him, it reflects "the particular direction our agency acquires by choosing to act in some ways rather than others." And research on the Beatitudes illustrates how Jesus, himself, was very concerned with the quality of one's character, and with the complex of traits that mark us as the persons we are. It

221 Berry, second interview.
222 Rohr, interview.
224 Ibid. 1109a 27.
seems that for Jesus, there was an intimate connection between that set of attributes that distinguish us from others, and vision. The radical feminist Andrea Dworkin has written:

There is one thing that is not practical, and it’s the thing I believe in most, and that is the importance of vision in the midst of what has to be done, never forgetting for one minute the world that you really want to live in and how you want to live in it and what it means to you and how much you care about it – what you want for yourselves and what you want for the people and things you love.\textsuperscript{226}

People see the world differently, depending on how they have been formed by the virtues that constitute their character. \textit{Virtue informs vision, and vision shapes action.}

The exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount showed that as mediator of the sacred, Jesus was concerned with teaching people about living. It is clear from the research that he believed that authentic life would be found in a journey away from conventional wisdom towards a personal relationship with God. This God valued compassion and justice, love and humility, truth and mercy, and expected the same of the created order for whom these qualities were a possibility. Embodying these qualities constituted the living of an authentic life. Many scholars have concluded that this was the key to entering the kingdom of God – the single most important paradigm of Jesus’ teaching. And the invitation to this kingdom was open to all who chose to enter into a consciousness of love, of

selflessness, and of a daily commitment to attend to others by practicing the presence of God.

Often Jesus’ invitation was extended in the form of a narrative. The power of this media lies in its ability to be put to work in the real world. John Dominic Crossan said that the parables are really lures for self-education. And as they draw people to participate in their meaning through common language describing everyday life, a sense of the divine is brought down to the scale of the average person.  

Jesus had found that it is often through story, and in the pleasure and pain of mundane life, that one finds the kingdom of God. And so, in an attempt to discern the presence of ecological principles, here are stories of “kingdom people” - ones who are engaged in living out the virtues or principles of the Beatitudes in their daily lives. Although more famous people could have illustrated these same qualities, “regular folk” were chosen for good reason. It is easy to think that only certain kinds of people in certain kinds of circumstances have what it takes to exemplify the various virtues of the Beatitudes. But when Jesus preached his message of blessing, it was extended to everyone - at the center of things and the marginalized; to religious and political authorities as well as to “the worker among workers.” All people have the capacity to live in the Kingdom. Indeed, anyone who could hear and receive the invitation had all that they needed to enter in. The beatitude accompanying each narrative will be identified at the outset. Afterward, if appropriate, ecological threads will be

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227 Hitt, A Gospel, 46.
traced from the illustrated principles of the beatitude to their corresponding
principles in ecology.

We shall begin at the beginning:

Tuned to the Source are those who live by breathing Unity, their
"I can!" is included in God's
(Blessed are the poor in spirit);

Blessed are those in emotional turmoil, they shall be united
inside by love
(Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted)

Gordon ran a church camp in southern New Hampshire. It was an
unassuming place, whose façade reflected his interior world: sparsely furnished,
wooden sleeping cabins; an unadorned compound surrounded by simple white
buildings which housed the dining hall, recreational hall, meeting house, and
dormitory housing for the staff; a small swimming hole; an open field; and the
chapel: a birch cross atop of a hill. Ortega y Gasset once said, "Tell me the
landscape in which you live, and I shall tell you about God." The landscape of
the camp stood as illustration and context for much of Gordon's personal spiritual
work, and his teaching of Spirit to others.

Once a New York banker, Gordon and his wife, Cy, accepted the invitation
to administer the camp from the national office of the United Church of Christ
sometime in the 70's. After leaving their life of material abundance for personal

228 Ortega y Gasset, quoted in "Belden Lane," Landscapes of the Sacred, New York: Paulist
reasons, over the years Gordon mentored thousands of children and adults in
what he believed were the ways of God. His daily behavior taught others what
he had discovered for himself: the praxis of servanthood and recognition of utter
dependence were the two most fundamental spiritual callings that people could
ever heed. Watching his behavior and listening to his words showed how such
callings could be experienced through lessons found in simple things. For
example, before each meal the summer staff would set the tables: Plate in
center; napkin on the right with fork on top; knife and spoon to the left; cup
between top of knife and spoon; and so on. One afternoon, towards the end of
this daily ritual, Gordon marched to the center of the dining hall to make an
announcement. He had been watching the setting of tables, and was concerned
about how it was being done. Although the knives and forks were not misplaced,
the attitudes of the staff were. During the setting of tables, some of them were
grumbling about their task, others were not paying attention. Some were trying
to rush through to get on to something else. Not one of them was fully present to
what they were doing at the time. Gordon told the staff that their efforts did not
reflect the ministry the camp was trying to extend. He then demonstrated how
being authentic was an immediate, momentary thing. Every napkin placed, every
pat of butter served, must be accompanied by a prayer of blessing for the one
who would receive. Whether the recipient was conscious of this attitude or not
was beside the point. God expected the most from those who served in God's
name. And so, every action and thought must be done in total consciousness of
other. Every action and thought must be extended in love.
In this same manner, Gordon tried to attend to the needs of the community – both at the camp and beyond. A father of one of the annual campers was an alcoholic. The child would often cry about the situation, and every year would wonder aloud how he should handle his father. Should he try and shame him into changing? Should he hurt his dad? Should he hurt himself? Should the camp refuse his father’s visit? Would Gordon write a letter of admonishment? Over the years, Gordon became well-acquainted with the situation. And he was adamant that the solution would be found in love. In addition to offering a great deal of empathy and encouragement to the child, Gordon reminded him that the camp was about family, and that the whole idea of community is that people find a way to hold everybody. He showed the child how to look at his dad not for who he was, but as who he could become. By seeing through the eyes of love, beyond the man that he presented as, somehow, in the eyes of the child, the father was transformed. Shame and blame no longer determined who each saw themselves to be. Though his struggle with alcohol lasted many years after, father and son found a place where they could be in relationship with each other. Gordon helped them learn that although the pain of something often makes us want to walk out or away, when life, or a particular idea of it, is torn from us, we have to sit with the tearing because, Gordon believed, where else can healing occur, except where the wound resides?

Aligned with the One are the humble, those submitted to God’s will; they shall be gifted with the productivity of the earth

(Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth)
Aligned with the One are those whose lives radiate from a core of love; they shall see God everywhere

(Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God)

Cynthia, a protégé of and editor for Thomas Merton, came to a seminary campus in northern New England in the early 90’s as an adjunct faculty. Humble and unassuming yet unmistakably charismatic, she was hired to teach a class on contemplative meditation. The cacophony of outrage she had to endure from a host of students, demanding to know what place contemplative meditation had on a seminary campus, was troubling. But Cynthia was undeterred, and through her course she extended to each student an invitation to discover for themselves a whole new relationship with God.

Over time, much of the campus anger and fear that greeted Cynthia and her course was replaced by curiosity and gratitude. As Cynthia instructed on the possibility of the contemplative discipline, and people began to engage in the most demanding spiritual self-examination that contemplation inspires, their imaginative capacities were reborn. Many participants started to experience a new identity for themselves, a new understanding of God, and a new vision of the world in which they lived. For some, the ego of ordination, and institutional theological power was slowly replaced by a sense of humility before the great responsibilities of their vocation. Others came to know their insignificance within an awesome creation, yet fully believed that they were cared for intimately and completely. Dorothee Soelle, an activist in peace and ecological movements, once said that mysticism was resistance, that when one experiences unity with
God, it necessarily puts us in radical opposition to what is regarded as a normal way of life. Through her instruction on contemplative meditation, Cynthia helped her students resist the pull of the world, and enter, instead, into a consciousness of the movement of Love in all things.

*Tuned to the Source are those who plant peace each season, they shall become fountains of Livingness*

*(Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God)*

*Aligned with the One are you when you are conspired against and driven away for my sake. Then feel at the peak of everything and let your ego disappear, for thus is the secret of claiming your expanded home in the Universe*

*(Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.)*

Bruce is a member of a small Protestant congregation in Maine. He is also an active and committed member of a local peace and justice organization. It is his conviction that membership in one necessarily assumes membership in the other. Bruce can be counted on to write letters to the editor about injustices in the community, and send petitions to elected officials in support of legislation that ensures rights for marginalized people and issues. He protests against nuclear facilities, will not support corporations engaged in unfair labor practices, and purchases food and daily supplies locally, as much as he can.

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When the war in Iraq began, Bruce was one of the first to find himself on a tiny bridge in the seacoast of Maine in demonstration against U.S. engagement. In such a small town, his was an unmistakable presence as he stood on its only bridge, at noon every Sunday, just as people were filing out of and driving home from their various places of worship. The first Sunday, he demonstrated alone. But over the course of several weeks, people began to join the protest in great numbers. At first, the right side of the bridge collected all members of the debate. Eventually, the sides divided, and those against the war stayed on the right, while those who supported the war collected on the left.

But, as time went on, fewer people showed up to demonstrate. And one day, Bruce was back to being the only presence on the bridge. When asked why he left the comfort of coffee hour to continue his protest long after the others had abandoned their posts, Bruce said it was because he believed that the war – any war – violated every teaching about God that Jesus ever gave. So, even though it was no longer fashionable to be present to this situation in such a public way, and even though most of the time those who had demonstrated in the past no longer joined him, and despite the jabs and jeers he receives in print and in person by those who choose to disrespect his behavior – if not his reasons for them – he believes it is his responsibility to show up. And so, every Sunday, at noon, just as people are leaving their places of worship, if you drive over a tiny bridge in the midcoast of Maine, you will see one man showing up. He will be holding up a simple sign, and it says, “Peace.”
Tuned to the Source are those who long clearly for an inner and outer foundation of peace, they shall be embraced by birthing power

(Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled)

Blessed are those who are dislocated for the cause of justice, their new home is the province of the Universe

(Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.)

Bob is one of the passionate voices in the struggle for affordable and sustainable housing in the seacoast area of Maine. By all appearances, affording a home isn’t a problem he is personally acquainted with. And, he has received advice of so many friends and business associates who caution that this isn’t an issue worth his concern. But Bob is concerned, and believes that the community can and should do better for the people in his area. And so, after writing letters to the editor, and speaking to civic groups looking for support, and finding little of it, he founded a movement and is making his vision of justice possible for all people.

Pursuit of his vision has come at a price, however. If you were to read the letters written to the editor about Bob and his housing project, it would be obvious how furious some people are with his work. Some people are afraid of just who it is that will eventually become their neighbors. Some people think Bob has a kind of “God-complex.” Some fail to see why they should be made responsible for what others don’t have. Bob cares what people think, but not enough to stop him from doing what he believes he should do. Has he lost friends? Yes. Has he
lost standing in his social group? Yes. Has he lost the respect of some business colleagues? Yes. But he feels that at the end of the day he can say that he is using his energy and ideas to do what is right. That matters to him. And, he believes, it matters to God, too.

_Blessed are those who from their inner wombs birth mercy; they shall feel its warm arms embrace them_

_(Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy)_

Patrice has found her calling among the inmates in a prison. She believes Jesus’ mandate to minister to the “least of our brothers and sisters” - the poor, the dispossessed, and the despised - is inclusive of those in her care. Fulfilling her role as a sort of representative of God, she thinks she has no right or responsibility to proselytize to a captive audience. Rather, Patrice understands her vocation as simply this: God has called her to convey a message to those with whom she gathers each week. Her attitude and behavior should tell them, unmistakably, that they are loved.

One of the ways that she tries to do this is through the fellowship of a shared meal. Interpreting Jesus’ message as one of utter inclusivity, Patrice sees the call to gospel life as directly related to and illustrated by the symbolism of the table. She learns a lot about the people in her care based on who is there at the meal and who isn’t; who eats one thing and who another. For her, the Kingdom of God is unmistakably announced in the sharing of a common meal, where the table is spread for all to enjoy. “Sharing table fellowship repeatedly
builds a history of trust.\textsuperscript{230} It is the trust of the inmates that Patrice works so hard to earn, for she has discovered that trusting in another has a way of opening the door of the heart. It is an opening that sometimes is just wide enough to give a person an opportunity to consider information about the world that, for many reasons, they did not have access to before. In this manner, the idea of love and the reality of love — love for others, love for themselves — becomes a distinct possibility for their lives. And every now and then, if it gets inside the door, love takes root and grows, and begins its work of resurrection of spirit and transformation of lives. The step across the threshold to another’s home, to share food may be the longest journey in any world, but it is one way that Patrice has found to demonstrate to her outcast community, that the Kingdom can be announced to anyone.

To summarize these stories of kingdom people:

- Gordon mentors others through his life and work at the church camp. In doing so, he exhibits the virtues of simplicity and compassion.

- Cynthia teaches contemplative meditation at a seminary. She manifests the qualities of humility and love.

- Bob works for affordable, sustainable housing. He embodies the virtues of justice and right relationship.

- Bruce is demonstrating against a war. By investing his passion in such a way, he demonstrates the way of peace and integrity.

- Patrice works with prison inmates. In doing so she embodies mercy.

\textsuperscript{230} Rohr, \textit{Jesus' Plan for a New World}, 80.
Each of these people expresses a quality (or qualities) of character found within the Beatitudes. Simplicity and compassion; humility and love; justice and right-relationship; peace-making, integrity and mercy are all keys to the Kingdom of God, and just a few of what chapter two defined as ecological principles. For when we say, “Everything is connected to everything else,” (Principle One) we are talking about compassion, love, right relations, and mercy; “Everything has to go somewhere” (Principle Two) illustrates how in some measure, life is a circle, in which a sense of reciprocity prevails. In other words, we need to be conscious of right relationship for so often what we give out we get back, and what we think about ourselves and the world becomes the truth for us. Nature knows best (Principle Three) speaks to the need for simplicity, humility, and peace; and when we claim that “There is no such thing as a free lunch” (Principle Four) we are calling forth the virtues of integrity, justice, and humility.

It was David Orr who wondered that, lacking the quality of virtue, could we do the difficult things that will be necessary to live within the boundaries of nature?231 There are many who think we cannot. Certain principles seem indispensable to the task. Perhaps when we ask what kind of people we need to be in order to care for the earth, we need only read these stories of Kingdom people, illustrations of what the beatitudes look like in practice, to discover how these same certain traits are central to earth-care. “The biodiversity crisis calls on humans to pay attention at our deepest levels to where we are on the trail, to

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listen as teachers and as students, and to foster discovery of gestures that honor the world," says Grumbine.232 The journey toward acquiring these traits, and to behavior and attitudes that respect the earth and its inhabitants, seems to prompt us to change our inquiry from "What are we to do?" to "What kind of people ought we be?" Keizer said that our environmental crisis is very much a metaphysical crisis, "a crisis in the secret places, perhaps a crisis in the very heart of God. And whatever got us into that crisis, only love will get us out – and keep us out...any environmental movement must be a movement of the Holy Spirit, whom the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins described as brooding over the world, 'with warm breast, and Ah, bright wings,' and Dante called 'the love that moves the sun and other stars.'"233 Many other scholars who are engaged in studying the ethics of earth-care would concur with his position. Almost without exception, they believe that our success will be measured not only by how much of the earth we can protect, but also by the amount of love and respect for all of life we can engender in other people – qualities inherent in ecological principles; qualities necessary to realize the kingdom of God.234

Conclusion

The Sermon on the Mount is revolutionary teaching. Jesus had watched and searched the righteous in his day and now joined issue with it.

The Beatitudes, far from being passive or mild, are a gauntlet flung down before the world’s accepted standards. Thus they become clearer when set against their opposites. The opposite of ‘poor in spirit’ are the proud in spirit. The opposite of those who mourn are those always bent on pleasure. The opposite of the meek are the aggressors. The opposite of the persecuted are those who always play it safe and compromise.\textsuperscript{235}

The \textit{Beatitudes} reveal the secret of happiness: that happiness lies within – a by-product of a way of life and worship. But such happiness does not dwell within unless it is shared, and unless an attempt is made to embody it in our social modes. From the research of Chapters Five and Six it is clear that Jesus expects his teaching to be put into practice. It is not a formless ethical ideal. For him, righteousness is more than the sum of commandments; it is a total attitude of mind, and a particular practice of character.

That this text is revolutionary is certain. But is it ecological? The research shows that it is. The science of ecology is the science of interrelationship and interdependency, the study of the relation of organisms to one another and to their environment. In other words, like the \textit{Beatitudes}, ecology hinges on the principle of communion, in which nothing is created or exists in isolation from the rest of creation. To cultivate an ecological consciousness one must explore and internalize an ideal of reverence for life, recognizing that the earth’s soul is our own. Like the daily living of the beatitudes, which necessarily requires a particular practice of character, the journey to an ecological consciousness requires honest and deep reflection about what we have done with the lives we have been given, and a creative exploration of ways to actualize sustainable

\textsuperscript{235} \textit{Interpreter’s Bible}, 278.
societies. The earth calls us to pursue justice, respect, and peace for all beings, ultimately declaring our responsibility to one another.

Based on this research of ecology and the *Beatitudes*, it is clear that ecological threads run throughout the biblical text. Says Rohr:

Jesus is teaching that right relationship is the ultimate and daily criterion. If a social order allows and encourages, and even mandates, good connectedness between people and creation, people and events, people and people, and people and God, then you create a world of right relationship...It is all about union and communion, it seems, which means that it is also about forgiveness, letting go, service and lives of patience, and simplicity.236

This posture of right relationship, and the principles listed by Rohr are the very threads which connect the *Sermon on the Mount* to ecological principles. Both illustrate their common themes of service, wholeness, simplicity, reconciliation, integrity, empathy, sacred imagination, humility, and intimacy. The way of blessing articulated in the *Beatitudes* is an act of faith in the radical potential of our world to be made whole, a blessing that graces us to incarnate its promise of unity. The final chapter will now examine if it is appropriate and/or possible to apply a blessing specific to the environment, and will enable the research to conclude whether or not this paradigm is sufficient to the task of correcting our ecological vision.

236 Rohr, *Jesus Plan for a New World*, 12.
CHAPTER EIGHT:

CONCLUSION- AN ECOLOGICAL BLESSING

Introduction

Much has been said about ecology and religion in recent years that support a connection between them. As religion and science seek to understand how they relate to the planet earth, they must be able to inspire each other in a cooperative effort to help guide the future good health of the planet and those that live in it. On the one hand, science must be free to inform the religious community about the health of God's creation. On the other, the ageless teachings of religion must be free to recapture an understanding of relationship to, and meaning of, the Universe through its world of wisdom and mystery. The new understanding of nature needs to be both scientific (i.e. testable through the scientific method and replicable) and spiritual, for "it is not only a matter of figuring out what to do with misplaced hydrocarbons or rising sea water and mountains of trash. It is figuring out what we see when we look into a still pool, a mountain range, the country of another people, or the mysteries of childhood,"
and how these visions may help us to formulate a future – to find home," says Sauer.\textsuperscript{237}

Like many other faiths, Christianity throughout the world has been challenged and changed by the environmental movement and modern ecological thought. Moved by the seriousness of pollution, climate change, endangered species, resource depletion, and over-population, many Christian leaders, theologians, and local clergy have come to recognize that the earth as a whole is in an unprecedented predicament. Even if this response is not uniform, and although requests for renewed theological vision and attention toward earth-care are not heeded by all, still, it is becoming increasingly widespread. It should not be surprising, then, that many in the Christian faith are joining with religious traditions around the globe in becoming committed to an environmental agenda. For example, almost twenty years ago, in September of 1986, at the 25\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), religious leaders from around the world joined together in an historic meeting that led to the drafting of the Assisi Declaration – a promise to the Earth in recognition of the human family’s responsibility to this fragile island home. Using language that would be easily identified as environmental activism, Christian participants, among others, made a commitment to work to preserve the environment. For example, in the declaration, Father Lanfranco Servini called for an end to:

\begin{quote}
...uncontrolled use of technology for immediate economic growth, with little or no consideration for the planet’s resources and their possible renewal;
\end{quote}

disregard for just and peaceful relations among peoples; destruction of cultures and environments during war; ill considered exploitation of natural resources by consumer oriented societies; un-mastered and unregulated urbanization; and, the exclusive preoccupation with the present without any regard for the future quality of life.\textsuperscript{238}

The success of Assisi was followed by further conferences, including one in 1995 at Ohito in Japan, when the Summit on Religions and Conservation adopted the Ohito Declaration. It said:

The health of the planet is being undermined by systemic breakdowns on several levels...Human systems continue to deteriorate, as evidenced by militarism, warfare, terrorism, refugee movement, violations of human rights, poverty, debt and continued domination by vested financial, economic and political interests. Biological systems and resources are being eroded, as evidenced by the ongoing depletion, fragmentation and pollution of the natural systems. Recognizing the important parallels between cultural and biological diversity, we feel a special urgency with regard to the ongoing erosion of cultures and faith communities and their environmental traditions, including the knowledge of people living close to the land.\textsuperscript{239}

And just recently, in March, 2005, the National Council of Churches released the following statement: "We express profound grief at the Senate's decision to include drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as part of the budget resolution. Rather than reduce our consumption of oil and begin to move our nation toward clean energy alternatives, our elected officials are once again charting a course that is both unjust and unsustainable."\textsuperscript{240}

\textsuperscript{238} Assisi Declaration: Messages on Man and Nature from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, Basilica di Francesco, Assisi, Italy, WWF 25\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary, September 29, 1986.  


\textsuperscript{240} USA Today, March 16, 2005.
Claims that we are in ecological distress, in and of themselves, however, do not make for a particularly religious contribution to the issues of ecology and the environment. Rather, as Chapters Three and Four revealed, part of what is so important about a Christian contribution is that it brings to a conversation about ecology the context of a new language, expressing a distinct point of view: the human responsibility to a commitment to conservation and the environment for all in God’s realm. For example, Thomas Aquinas once said, “Any error about creation also leads to an error about God.” Joseph Sittler said, “It is difficult but possible to get men to understand that pollution is biologically disastrous, aesthetically offensive, equally obviously economically self-destructive and socially reductive of the quality of human life. But it is a very difficult job to get even Christians to see that so to deal with the Creation is Christianly blasphemous.” And Wendell Berry offered:

The ecological teaching of the bible is simply inescapable: God made the world because He wanted it made. He thinks the world is good, and He loves it. It is His world; He has never relinquished title to it. And he has never revoked the conditions, bearing on His gift to us of the use of it that oblige us to take excellent care of it. If God loves the world, then how might any person of faith be excused for not loving it or justified in destroying it?

Many Christians believe that religious concern for the conservation and ecological integrity of the natural world (inclusive of humans) is their common heritage, their birthright and their duty. To them, sacred scripture teaches

unequivocally that we have a responsibility to attend to God's creation and to be good neighbors. Many in the Christian community believe that bearing witness to the Biblical mandate to care for the least among us recognizes that harming the least among us harms all.

A Christian perspective applied to the earth can offer insights and prompt emotions that a purely secular story cannot. Such spiritual language has the potential to offer a discussion of ecology, and our environmental difficulties, a means to express its passion, hope, and love. Regardless of whether activists accept the explicit details of Christianity or not, religious language seems to add cosmological meaning to the scientific story of creation – meaning which invites people to resonate with the Universe, to see the whole world as integral to their very lives, instead of as backdrop to them. When, instead of a large rock with vegetation growing on it, the world becomes “creation,” or when we say “single, sacred community,” and the world becomes for us “an organic besouled whole,” instead of something outside of us and without emotion, such evocative language often invites people to become open to a new perspective on things, suddenly experiencing the world as holy where previously they could not. Just as heartbreakingly beautiful moments of places have the capacity to catch your breath, in conversations where religious language is used to convey the cosmological meaning of the every day, commonplace processes described by science as “life support systems” such as the flow of energy and the cycling of

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244 Thomas Berry, interview by author, notes, September 8, 2004.
matter, become small but powerful revelations to the mystery and wonder that is every moment all around and within us. All at once you realize that the earth and its particular places are infinitely worth cherishing and preserving: a revelation of ancient wisdom that was inaccessible before.

Science has led us to understand the mechanics of the world, that the Universe is a place of self-organizing, spontaneous, creativity. Christianity can provide a sense of reverence for, and purpose in, life in this same Universe, offering a picture of a wider reality of a world-in-communion, created as a beginning, as a hope. It seems, then, that it is by uniting these disciplines that we will most likely be able to create what is necessary for the human species, for the planet, to become whole again. Says Greene, "The environmental crisis cannot be solved solely by addressing the human impacts on the environment or even by focusing on human behavior as regards the environment. The environmental crisis can only be forestalled when there is a broad new cultural understanding of what it means to be human."246 If the environmental crisis is a spiritual one, then by linking the scientific creation story that has so recently emerged, to our very deep human need for meaning and spiritual fulfillment in life, would the human species be sufficiently realigned with how it sees its lives, and thus how they live them out? This dissertation was designed to consider this very issue.

Through consideration of the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, and the basic principles that constitute ecology, the research looked for evidence of

an ecological consciousness in the sacred text. Are the Beatitudes ecological? I have found that the answer is yes. Any religious discussion which envisions God-in-relationship reflects the core of an ecological consciousness. In Chapter Seven the narratives of "kingdom lives" found sufficient testimony that those who live in allegiance to the Beatitudes make manifest the principles of the kingdom which include simplicity, humility, right-relationship, peace, justice, integrity – in essence, the heart of an ecological consciousness. The question that remains for this concluding chapter is whether or not applying the Beatitudes to the ecological issues of our time is appropriate and beneficial.

An Ecological Blessing

In a recent interview, Thomas Berry stated that in order to engage in reconciliation with the environment, a person must accept the deep mystery of the Universe.

We are planetary creatures. This is the context for humans. The planet is the primary reality that we need to respond to because the planet has a sacred function. The Universe has to be sacred before humans can be sacred, for in terms of origin: God is first and the Universe is derivative; in terms of human knowledge, the natural world is first and God is consequence. The natural world is the basis out of which theological process functions.247

In other words, the preservation of the earth is the primary condition for creation's existence and/or for any mode of understanding of the Divine. According to Berry, the Divine presents itself through the created world.

247 Thomas Berry, interview by author, notes, November 17, 2004.
From Chapter Three it can be said that many have come to believe that science cannot address such matters as this. It has no capacity for communicating beyond mechanics the more significant aspects of the universe, like questions of Presence. Science enables us to understand how the processes of the Universe work. But like the difference between one who can describe how an instrument is played, for example, but on its own can’t play it, science can describe the music of the universe, but it cannot perform the personal fulfillment, and the magic of the music, which is cosmology. Cosmology gives us understanding of the universe, for the science of religion is symbolic not literal. Though the world of wisdom and mystery is a mythic world, and though mythic words are imaginary projections to some scientists, what many people have come to realize is that myth is a legitimate way of knowing, and of understanding. And so, the human needs to recapture an understanding of relationship to mythic world if one is to be inclined toward earth-care. Says Berry:

Human intelligence has come to deal with God, with questions of “otherness” by knowing the world outside before we know the world inside. Science deals with the Universe by helping us to know the world “outside.” Questions of “otherness”, however, are attended to through an acceptable Cosmology, which deals with the Universe by helping people to know the world “inside.”

Although different people will surely go their different ways in explaining the Universe, and give to the Universe their own sense of mystery and wonder, many believe, like Berry, that at the heart of all explanation will be a transcendent

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referent – some mode of presence that can be prayed to and that they can be
guided by in conduct. We have a system of knowing the outside world. What we
have been missing, it seems, is a system, or support, for taking what we know
"outside" to our worlds "inside."

The Beatitudes that begin the Sermon on the Mount manifest ecological
living within a cosmological context: the "inside" to our "outside" worlds. A
"judgment of science and a way of recovery,"249 in some measure they offer
science an escape from its dilemma – its loss of relationship with an acceptable
cosmology which has translated into a loss of integrity for the planet. If the
Beatitudes are about getting to a "positive, life-affirming orientation,"250 then, like
the medical profession, it has the capacity to treat the disease (of alienation), and
extend a program of improving health.

At the center of the Beatitudes is Presence. Jesus believed that practicing
the "Beatitude Way" would necessarily point to a cosmological reality, a particular
sense of Other: entrance into the kingdom of God. For him there was no
question but that praxis of its principles would reclaim and remember this deep
knowing as a legitimate framework for understanding the universe. And, as one
commenced the practice of these principles, and came to believe in a power
greater than themselves, everything would change. Pointing toward the


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Universe, toward God, Spirit, and "Great Nest of Being"\textsuperscript{251} as the primary existence from which all others derive, the \textit{Beatitudes} insist that all allegiance must go there; all efforts of praise must be in that direction. Once this big picture was revealed in their practice of the "Beatitude Way," people could come to understand that the human was not primary revelation; that knowledge was not primary revelation; and eventually, today, that ecological systems and their principles were not primary revelation.

It is the judgment of Chapters Five and Six that in the desert, Jesus discovered that, for him, at the heart of the Universe was the reality of self-emptying Love, which created the world in such a way that one might choose freely to follow its path – or not. On this path, new and different things could happen at any time and place – in each and every moment that one is present to. This was Jesus' experience of God, and through the \textit{Beatitudes} he extended his vision to others. Simplicity, courage, hope, freedom, peace, and partnership: these were a loving, creative, and deeply risky response to a world created by power, and the violence of an empire. As Cullinan says:

\begin{quote}
Empire has been a staple of civilization since the beginning – "in every generation, Pharoah," as the Jewish celebration of Passover reminds us – and biblical religion, from the beginning has been about living against empires, under the reign and authority of God alone. The Universe Story and the Beatitudes together offer us a profound new way to understand the social realities around us, and give us ways to combat those realities by
\end{quote}

behaving in surprising ways that are, in the end, rooted in the ultimate reality of Creation.\(^{252}\)

Of course to the people of Jesus' day, the way of Love might not have seemed like the "ultimate reality of Creation," reduced, as they were, to "the poor in spirit", and "the meek" - marginalized by the oppressive forces of conventional wisdom. But by his own life's example, Jesus mentored those who chose to follow him in the practice of the presence of God. Says Rohr:

One will not, of course, turn away from what seems like the only game in town (political, economic, or religious) unless one has glimpsed a more attractive alternative. We cannot even imagine it, much less imitate it, unless we see one human being do it first. Jesus has forever changed human imagination, and we are now both burdened and gladdened by the new possibility, for now there is good news to counter the deadening bad news."\(^{253}\)

The most unsettling piece of Jesus' alternative wisdom, and perhaps the most consistent, is that - freed from the lie that the rest of us cannot see - the outcast is at a significant advantage, precisely because he or she has been excluded from the false sacred system. Jesus thus begins by a most incredible statement: blessed are the poor!\(^{254}\) In this manner, Jesus showed his followers that the way of Love - made manifest in simplicity, meekness, partnership, and peace - would one day be revealed as the true way of the kingdom, even as the power, violence, oppression, and ego of conventional wisdom would one day be revealed as the world's greatest lie.


\(^{253}\) Meyers and Rohr, *Bias from the Bottom.*

\(^{254}\) Matthew 5:3, NRSV.
Many have come to believe that when people live in the premise of the Divine, it stands to reason, then, that whether one looks at the Beatitudes from an ecological perspective, or looks at ecology from a beatitude perspective the view is the same. The Beatitudes do contain the principles of ecology. But, the principles of ecology are also inclusive of the beatitudes, because both are derivative of the same planet earth, the same manifestation of Universe. This is the integral approach, first developed by Fechner, who maintained, as one scholar summarized it, that:

...the whole universe is spiritual in character, the phenomenal world of physics being merely the external manifestation of this spiritual reality. Atoms are only the simplest elements in a spiritual hierarchy leading up to God. Each level of this hierarchy includes all those levels beneath it, so that God contains the totality of spirits. Consciousness is an essential feature of all that exists...The evidences of soul are the systematic coherence and conformity to law exhibited in the behavior of organic wholes.

In Fechner’s view, spirit and matter were inseparable: two sides of one great reality. As the earth, far from separating our bodies from the universe, connects and incorporates us with the universe, so the spirit of the earth, far from separating our spirits from divine spirit, forms a higher individual connection of every earthly spirit with the spirit of the universe. “The more ultimate and encompassing reality is not this or that person, this or that tribe or people, this or that nation, or even humanity as a whole. Rather it is nature in its entirety — or rather the fact that nature actually is — that is the ultimate and profound reality

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256 Fechner, Life after Death, 16-17.
from which we emerge and in which we live out our allotted time," says Brockelman.  Many have come to see that it is this story of the Universe, the cosmological vision of a community of others, in which love, caring and compassion are extended to all fellow beings, that is necessary to enact an ecological vision for the well-being of our planet and those who inhabit it.

The kind of spirituality strong enough, inspiring enough, ecological enough to move us into this kind of vision for creation can be found in the Beatitudes. Scholars from a variety of disciplines maintain that the ecological crisis requires a spiritual transformation of the human species – both on an individual basis and as a culture. Says Rohr, "Such a new world order is so foundationally different, so transformative of perspective, that it demands a complete turnaround of worldviews." Greene adds, "The environmental crisis can only be solved...by a transformation of a culture." And Schumacher concludes, "By whatever name, something akin to spiritual renewal is the sine qua non of the transition to sustainability." To do this, we need the inspiration, hope, and guidance of a spirituality that can lead us through this passage. The stories of Kingdom people shared in Chapter Seven illustrate that people are capable of great sacrifice when they are inspired, passionate, and confidant of their guiding vision. Their life's work – the Beatitudes in praxis - maintains that in God's world, all things are

257 Paul Brockelman, Cosmology and Creation: The Spiritual Significance of Contemporary Cosmology, 208.
interrelated and interconnected as a single, sacred community. Passionately in love with Being, they do not hold back. Rather, they “participate whole-heartedly in the Great Work needed at this juncture.”

If we were to live out the eternal, fundamental morality Jesus modeled on a mountaintop for all to hear, we would be taught the origins of our environmental problems as well as the implications for the earth of right response. According to Jesus, the answers to our difficulties have always been simple, and always been clear:

_Tuned to the Source are those who live by breathing Unity, their “I can!” is included in God’s_ (Blessed are the poor in spirit)

In a world where one out of every 318 people on the planet today is a refugee, searching the garbage cans of the world looking for food, and following resources stolen from their own lands that have become jobs in other places, we must speak of limits and living within them.

_Blessed are those in emotional turmoil, they shall be united inside by love_ (Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted)

In his address on “The Foundations of Christian Ethics,” Bonhoeffer said, “The Earth remains our Mother, as God remains our Father, and our Mother will

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261 Thomas Berry, interview by author, notes, Greensboro, N.C., September 8, 2004.
only lay in the Father's arms those who remain true to her. Earth and its distress – that is the Christian's 'Song of Songs'.

And so, we must grieve at the worst that happens in creation community – the destruction of bounty and beauty - when the human species fails to align its own designs with the needs of the whole.

Aligned with the One are the humble, those submitted to God's will; they shall be gifted with the productivity of the earth

(Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth)

We must say a great anti-American truth: that the United States of America is not God. That our ways are only different, not best; that we must respect other living things, all living things, and humbly be willing to learn from each other.

Tuned to the Source are those who long clearly for an inner and outer foundation of peace, they shall be embraced by birthing power

(Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled)

We must call the human species to pursue ecological integrity by building democratic societies that are just, participatory, and sustainable- that readily captures the integral functioning of the economy of the earth. A moral

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community can only be actualized when it provides for others what it demands for itself.\textsuperscript{265}

\textit{Blessed are those who from their inner wombs birth mercy; they shall feel its warm arms embrace them}

\textit{ (Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy)}

When we accept the responsibility for the well-being of the planet, we stand as a presence of hope, and extend a call to help create a global partnership for building a just and sustainable world for all of life.

\textit{Aligned with the One are those whose lives radiate from a core of love; they shall see God everywhere}

\textit{ (Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God)}

"Real-life community has never been a synonym for harmony. The worst happens there, as does the noblest," says Rasmussen.\textsuperscript{266} But we can, and must, challenge ourselves to unmask the values that guide our behavior so that we may think and live in allegiance to an ecological vision; so that we may choose a better way. We must require truth from one another and integrity from our institutions and ourselves which are all too often more concerned with saving the system than saving the planet.

\textsuperscript{265} \textit{Earth Charter, Principles, Section II: Ecological Integrity.}

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Tuned to the Source are those who plant peace each season, they shall become fountains of Livingness

(Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God)

When war is waged it is because the rest of us have been timid in our commitment to the good. We cannot allow war for others and expect to be blessed ourselves with lives of peace. We must assert our dignity and beat our swords into ploughshares – the better to plow our lands and feed our communities. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Adolfo Perez Esquivel comments, “Nonviolence is a lifestyle. The final objective is life.”

All of these statements are the evidence of an ecological blessing - a consciousness made manifest in the living out of the principles of the Beatitudes. Do these things, and you will move on the path toward ecological vision. Do these things, and the world that’s dying will become a new world coming to life. Do these things and you will not only inspire, you will transform.

Conclusion

The dream of an Earth ethic is a dream of community sufficiently generous to include the whole cosmos. A community of creation has become a basic religious and moral claim for many people. Says Berry:

“There is no such thing as a human community in any manner that separates from the Earth community. The human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single integral community or we will

267 “An Interview with Adolfo Perez Esquivel,” Fellowship 51, July/August 1985, 10.
both experience disaster on the way. However differentiated in its modes of expression, there is only one Earth community – one economic order, one health system, one moral order, one world of the sacred."²⁶⁸

In a recent article about his book, *The Last Refuge*, David Orr concurs that the transition to sustainability will require a higher level of spiritual awareness. He says that although scientists in a secular culture are often uneasy about matters of spirit, science on its own can give no reason for sustaining humankind. It can, with equal rigor, create both the knowledge that will cause our demise or that is necessary to live at peace within the nature that includes all.²⁶⁹ In other words, science is a process – a process of investigation of the physical world and a method of relating that investigation. And cosmology is a vision of who and where we are - reflections on what it means to be human.

All cultures have possessed a cosmology: beliefs about the Universe and the physical world, its origins, processes, and its future. In these times, the story from science of the physical Universe is our contemporary cosmology. This new narrative of the beginning of all things is an amazing story still in the process of being told. It is a vision of ecological consciousness, made manifest in lives reflecting the discovery that all is imbued with sacredness. The *Beatitudes* are predicated on an experience of Jesus that when one makes this discovery of sacredness, which illustrates that everything that is exists because of the free act of Spirit – the Love that is the source of being – then everything becomes a

sacrament of the goodness and creative power of God. A sacrament requires that by whatever form it manifests, it need be appreciated for what it is and not as a tool to an end. In other words, a sacrament is always a "thou." For the many people who choose to live the "Beatitude Way" then, such a discovery can provide the deepest foundation for reverencing creation.

W.H. Auden once wrote that to serve as paradigm now, for what a plausible future might be, is what we're here for. The praxis of the Beatitudes is such a paradigm - one way to realize the blessings of sustainability, peace, and generosity of heart, waiting to be born in this beautiful world upon which our whole lives depend. As a manifestation of an ecological consciousness, the Beatitudes constitute, in practice, a vision inclusive of intentional earth-care. When the Beatitudes are a lived reality, they water the soul of a whole-earth community, they measure the rhythm of the pulse of the planet, and energize their participants for the long journey: through the pain of transformation, and into a translation of God's kingdom on earth.

On the historic journey into space so long ago, the astronauts made an incredible promise from humanity to the entire Universe. When they left the surface of the moon to return to their earthly home, they left behind this message: affixed to the leg of the lunar landing vehicle is a plaque signed by President Nixon, Neil A. Armstrong, Michael Collins, and Edwin E. Aldrin, Jr.
Figure 2. View of plaque Apollo 11 astronauts left on moon

The plaque bears a map of the Earth and this inscription:

HERE MEN FROM THE PLANET EARTH
FIRST SET FOOT UPON THE MOON
JULY 1969 A.D.
WE CAME IN PEACE FOR ALL MANKIND

And so it would appear that the challenge ahead of us – the creative task of attending appropriately to the earth and to all the cosmos – seems already predetermined, even if the way we shall manifest this work is not. If they are put in practice, it is clear that the Beatitudes can guide and inspire us as we attempt to shape the future. And so, when politicians work to deplete the forests and

270 Photograph provided courtesy of NASA, images.jcs.nasa.gov, image number S69-38749.
farmlands – speak. When they threaten the air and water – speak. When they
disregard the rights of species – speak. When they disparage the principles of
freedom and democracy – speak. And when they imperil the possibilities for
peace – speak.²⁷¹

The Beatitudes remind us that we are not called to do the work of the
earth alone. The hope and promise of the world rests on a chorus of voices
whispering, singing, and proclaiming that how we define ourselves as human
beings, who we imagine ourselves to be in the community of life, is directly
related to our experience of the Universe – of the God who calls us to be. As we
ponder the notions of creative power and divinity, of our own presence on the
earth, and the common destiny of all its inhabitants, perhaps we will come to see
that the successful transition to a lasting, ecological consciousness is in fact our
creative task for the entire creation.

The story of the Universe is in the process of evolution, just as our lives
will evolve if we let them. In the days to come, as we reflect upon our story, and
invest it with meaning, we shall realize that how we lived today will determine the
narrative told about us in the future. In the past, whenever we forgot our story we
became confused. And so, we must remember that “the winds and the rivers
never become confused. We must go to them constantly to be reminded of it, for
every being in the Universe is what it is only through its participation in the

story,"^{272} reminds Berry. If our actions become sources of compassion and love, if we practice justice and forgiveness, we will discover such principles multiplying in the life around us.

On a mountaintop, Jesus offered an alternative vision that promised that as we discover and express Presence in the Universe, we will multiply the place and power of divinity and enact into being the Kingdom of God. This was his vision of possibility. And if we, too, follow that vision, perhaps it will be said, one day, that the fruits of our labor resulted, finally, in the successful transition to a lasting, ecological consciousness in the story of the lives of all who share this planet.

Holy One," the disciple said, "how shall I know the difference between knowledge and enlightenment?" And the Holy One said, "When you have knowledge, you light a torch to find your way. When you have enlightenment, you become a torch to show the way."^{273}

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March 8, 2004

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Natural Resources, James Hall
PO Box 779
Newcastle, ME 04553

IRB #: 3157
Study: The Ecological Christ: Discerning an Ecological Consciousness in the Sermon on the Mount
Approval Date: 03/05/2004

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects. (This document is also available at http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/IRB.html.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed pink Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
John Carroll
### Appendix A: Comparative Translations of the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:1-12

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<tr>
<td>Haydeyn khadaw wa rwazw dagarkhun sgee bashmaya hakana geyr r'dapw l’nabiya d’men q’damaykun.</td>
<td>Then feel at the peak of everything and let your ego disappear, for this is the secret of claiming your expanded home in the Universe.</td>
<td>12 Then be glad and rejoice, for your reward is increased in heaven; for in this very manner they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</td>
<td>12 You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.</td>
<td>12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</td>
<td>12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- **Klotz/Aramaic** = Transliteration of the Aramaic characters into English by Neil Douglas-Klotz (Prayers of the Cosmos)
- **Klotz/Translation** = Translation from the Aramaic language by Neil Douglas-Klotz (Prayers of the Cosmos)
- **Lamsa** = Translation taken from Lamsa’s Modern New Testament
- **Message** = Translation taken from The Message
- **NRSV** = Translation taken from the New Revised Standard Version
- **KJV** = Translation taken from the King James Version
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<td>Tubwayhun layleyn detdrdep metol khenuta dilihon(hie) malkutha dashmaya.</td>
<td>Blessed are those who are dislocated for the cause of justice; their new home is the province of the Universe.</td>
<td>10'Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</td>
<td>10&quot;You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.</td>
<td>10'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</td>
<td>10'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tubwayhun immath damhasdeen l'khon waradpin l'khon wamrin eleykon kul milla bisha metolath b'dagalutha.</td>
<td>Aligned with the One are you when you are conspired against and driven away by the clamor of evil on all sides for my sake,</td>
<td>11'Blessed are you, when they reproach you and persecute you, and speak against you every kind of bad word, falsely, for my sake,</td>
<td>11&quot;Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable.</td>
<td>11'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.</td>
<td>11'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.</td>
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<td>Tubwayhun lamrahmane dalayhun nehwun rahme.</td>
<td>Blessed are those who, from their inner wombs, birth mercy; they shall feel its warm arms embrace them.</td>
<td>7'Blessed are the merciful, for to them shall be mercy.</td>
<td>7&quot;You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being &quot;careful,' you find yourselves cared for.</td>
<td>7'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.</td>
<td>7'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.</td>
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<td>Tubwayhun layleyn dadkeyn b'lebhon d'hinnon nehzun l'alaha.</td>
<td>Aligned with the One are those whose lives radiate from a core of love; they shall see God everywhere.</td>
<td>6'Blessed are those who are pure in their hearts, for they shall see God.</td>
<td>6&quot;You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.</td>
<td>6'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.</td>
<td>6'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tubwayhun lahwvday shlama dawnaw(hie) d'alaha nitqarun.</td>
<td>Tuned to the Source are those who plant peace each season' they shall become fountains of Livingness.</td>
<td>5'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.</td>
<td>5&quot;You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.</td>
<td>5'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.</td>
<td>5'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.</td>
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<td>Tubwayhun lawile d'hinnon netbayun.</td>
<td>Blessed are those in emotional turmoil, they shall be united inside by love.</td>
<td>4°Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted,</td>
<td>4°You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you.</td>
<td>'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.</td>
<td>'Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tubwayhun I'makikhe d'hinnon nertun arha.</td>
<td>Aligned with the One are the humble, those submitted to God's will; they shall be gifted with the productivity of the earth.</td>
<td>5°Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.</td>
<td>5°You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.</td>
<td>5°Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.</td>
<td>5°Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tubwayhun layleyn d'kaphneen watzheyn l'khenuta d'hinnon nisbhun.</td>
<td>Tuned to the Source are those who long for an inner and outer foundation of peace; they shall be embraced by birthing power.</td>
<td>6°Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be well satisfied.</td>
<td>6°You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.</td>
<td>6°Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.</td>
<td>6°Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.</td>
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<td>1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up to the mountain and as he sat down, his disciples drew near to him.</td>
<td>1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him.</td>
<td>1 When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down.</td>
<td>1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.</td>
<td>1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, and he said,</td>
<td>2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:</td>
<td>2 and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:</td>
<td>2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:</td>
<td>2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tubwayhun I'meskenae b'rukh d'dilhounhie malkutha dashmaya</td>
<td>Tuned to the Source are those who live by breathing Unity, their “I can!” is included in Gods.</td>
<td>3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</td>
<td>3 You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.</td>
<td>3 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</td>
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