It has been common in the “deep” ecology movement since the 1960’s is to call for a new spirituality and culture, and to blame the Bible and the Christian tradition for a theology and spirituality that is anti-female, antibody and anti-nature. This is seen as the underlying cultural cause of attitudes of separation from domination over and negation of nature that underlie the ecological crisis. Although I believe that there is a great deal of truth to this critique, and I myself have been engaged in documenting the attitudes, and their religious roots, I also see this attack as extremes and one-sided.

The Biblical and Christian traditions do have elements that sacralize domination and negation of body, earth, and woman. However, they also struggled against what they perceived to be injustice and evil and sought to vindicate the goodness of creation, the body, and their ultimate redemption against more extreme dualists that saw in the material world only the manifestation of the demonic. There are valuable insights that need to be reclaimed from the heritage to shape a contemporary, eco-feminist spirituality.

Let me be clear what I am not saying in this partial affirmation. I am not saying that the Biblical and Christian tradition is the sole source of religious truth, the only way of access to true divinity, and therefore only here is religious truth to be found. The Asian religious traditions, as well as the unjustly scorned nature religions of indigenous peoples, have precious resources that need to be cultivated. An ecological crisis of global proportions can mean nothing less than a true dialogue and mutual enrichment of all spiritual traditions.

Secondly, I am not saying that these Biblical and Christian traditions are adequate. They need critique and reinterpretation. However, I suspect that this is true of all human spiritual heritages. The global ecological crisis is a new situation. Until now, humans have assumed that the nature’s power far transcended puny humans. Even Biblical apocalyptic thought did not put power to destroy the Earth in human hands. The notion that our power has grown so great that we must now take responsibility for preserving the biotic diversity of the rain forests and the ozone layer of the stratosphere was unimaginable in past human experience.

Although Biblical and Christian tradition is not the only source for ecological spirituality, it is a source, which I believe those of us of Christian background cannot ignore, for several reasons. First, there are magnificent themes here that have a capacity to inspire. Secondly, Christian people and their institutions are a major world religion and world power. They have been major cause of the problems. Nevertheless, they will not be mobilized to conversion unless they can find the mandates for it in those traditions that carry meaning and authority for them. Finally, I suspect that none of us work in a healthy way if we operate merely out of alienation from out past. We need new visions, but new visions have power when they are not rootless, but experienced as gathering up and transforming our heritage.
The ecological theologies of Christian inspiration at this time seem to fall into two different types, which I will call the covenantal and the sacramental. The covenantal type is represented by books such as Richard Austin’s *Hope for the Land*. It draws strongly from Hebrew Scripture, and claims the Bible as the primary source of ecological theology. A second type is that of Matthew Fox’s *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* and Thomas Berry’s, *The Dream of the Earth*.² Fox claims a Biblical basis for his thought in the cosmological Christology of the New Testament. He also draws on Patristic and Medieval mysticism and casts out a wide net of ecumenical dialogue across world religions.

Protestants have generally been stronger on the covenantal tradition that searched for an ecological ethics, while Catholics have tended to stress the sacramental tradition. My view is that these two traditions, covenantal and sacramental, are complementary. The usable ecological theology, spirituality and ethic must interconnect these two traditions. Each supplies elements that the other lacks. In the covenantal tradition, we find the basis for a moral relation to nature and to one another that mandates patterns of the right relation, enshrining these right relations in law as the final guarantee against abuse. In the sacramental tradition, we find the heart, the ecstatic experience of I and thou, of interpersonal communion, without, moral relationships grow heartless and spiritless.

The Covenantal Tradition, Biblical and Modern

The notion that the Bible is anti-nature comes in part from the reading of the Bible popularized by German scholarship of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This scholarship read into the Bible their own sharp dualism of history against nature, setting the true God of history against the gods of nature. Although the Biblical view of God expresses a transformation of the way god is seen as is related to nature there is also a lively sense of God’s relation to and presence in nature that was overlooked in this stress on the God of History against nature.

Although God is seen as “creating” nature, rather than being and expression of it, nevertheless the nature God creates is alive and enters into lively relation to God. God delights in the creatures God creates, and the creatures return this rejoicing in joy and praise. Divine blessing inundates the earth as rain, and the mountains skip like a calf, the hills gird themselves with joy, the valleys deck themselves with grain; they shout and sing together for joy.

This language is typical of Hebrew Scripture. There is no reason to write it off as “mere poetic metaphor”, a judgment which reflects the modern loss of the experience of I-Thou relation to what we see around us. The experience of nature, of fields, mountains, streams, birds and animals, in Hebrew sensibility, while not seen as “divine”, is still very much animate, interesting as living beings with their Creator.

The modern nature-history split distorts the Biblical view. In the Biblical view, all things, whether they happen as human wars and struggles for liberation in and between cities or whether they happen as rain that brings abundant harvests or as drought that bring disaster to the fields upon which humans depend, are ‘events’ In all such events, whether in cities or in fields, Hebrews saw the presence and work of God, as blessing or as judgment.

All such events have moral meaning. If enemies overwhelm the walls of the city or floods break down irrigation channels and destroy the fruits of human labor, God is acting in judgment upon human infidelity. When humans repent and return to fidelity to God, then justice and
harmony will reign, not only in the city, but in the relations between humans and animals, the heavens and the earth. The heavens will rain sweet water, and the harvests will come up abundantly. Thus what modern Western thought has split apart as 'nature' and as 'history', Hebrew thought sees as one reality fraught with moral warning and promise.

There are problems in reading moral meaning and divine will into every event in 'nature'. We would not wish to see in every flood, drought, volcanic eruption and tornado the work of divine judgment. But when destructive floods rush down the Himalayan mountains, carrying all before them into the Pakistan delta, or drought sears African lands, we are right to recognize the consequences of human misuse of the land, stripping the forest cover that held back the torrential rains, and over-grazing the semi-arid African soils.

In these disasters today, we have to recognize a consequence of human culpability and a call to rectify how we use the land and how we relate to the indigenous people who depend on these lands. As human power expands, colonizing more and more of the planet's natural processes, the line between what was traditionally called 'natural evil', and which was ethically neutral, and what should be called sin; that is, the culpable abuse of human freedom and power, also shifts. Hebrew moral sensibility, in which relation to God is the basis for both justice in society and prosperity in nature, while disobedience to God's commands of right relation brings both violence to society and disaster to nature, takes on a new dimension of moral truth.

Hebrew genius saw divine commands of right relation between human beings and to the rest of the creation enshrined in a body of law. Much of this law did not seem relevant to Christians, who believed that their new relation to God through Christ allowed them to discard a good deal of it. But some elements of this legal tradition take on new meaning today, particularly the tradition of sabbatical legislation. These are the laws that mandate periodic rest and restoration of relations between humans, animals and land.

Hebrew theology of creation rejects the aristocratic split between a leisure-class divinity and a humanity that serves this divinity through slave labor that was typical of Ancient Near Eastern mythology. In Genesis God is described as both working and resting and thereby setting the pattern for all humans and their relations to land and animals in the covenant of creation. This pattern of work and rest is set through a series of concentric cycles, of seven days, seven years and seven times seven years.

On the seventh day of each week, not only the farmer, but also his humans and animal work force, are to rest. "On the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and your resident alien shall be refreshed" (Ex.23:12). In the seventh year attention is given to the rights of the poor and to wild animals, as well as to the renewal of the land itself. "For six years you shall sow your land and gather its yield; but the seventh year let it lie fallow, so the poor of your people may eat, and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard and your olive orchard (Ex.23:10-11). Slaves are to be set free and laborers to rest, as well.

Finally, in the Jubilee year, the fiftieth year, there is to be a great restoration of all relationships. Those who have lost their land through debt are to be restored to their former property. Debts are to be forgiven, and captives freed. The earth is to lie fallow, and animals and humans are to rest. All the accumulated inequities of the past seven times seven years, between humans in debt, loss of land and enslavement, and to nature in overuse of land and animals, are to be rectified. All is to be restored to right balance.
This vision of periodic redemption and restoration of right relation underlies Jesus' language in the Lord's Prayer. It is a vision of redemption more compatible with finitude and human limits than the radical visions of the millennium and the once-for-all apocalyptic end of history through which recent Biblical scholarship has read the meaning of the term "Kingdom of God". Modern revolutionary thinkers would have done better if they had taken the Jubilee, rather than the millennium and the apocalyptic future, as their models of historical change. Periodic renewal and restoration of right relations is a more doable and less dangerous vision than final perfection.

Although Christians saw themselves as people of the new covenant, a covenant no longer limited to one people, the Jews, or to one land, but extended to all nations and to the whole earth, they also spiritualized and eschatologized these ideas in a way that lost the concreteness of Hebrew faith. Christians, in the early centuries, were city people, and the farmer ethic of Sabbatical legislation was less meaningful to them. In their belief in a Christ that had transcended the law, they saw themselves as mandated to ignore some good ideas, along with some bad ideas, in Hebrew legislation.

The Reformation, with its stress on historical, rather than allegorical, interpretation of Scripture, brought new attention to Hebrew Scripture. In the Reformed tradition there was a new stress on the idea of being a covenanted people, and this was identified with the social and political contracts binding local and national communities. Not all of this had positive results. There was a revival of tribal notions of being an elect People of God that fueled English and American religious/racial nationalisms.

However, another aspect of the notion of covenant as the basis of political community gave birth to the idea of citizens who contract together to form civil society, who have mutual rights and obligations and whose leaders are accountable to the citizens. These ideas have been the foundation of modern constitutional government. In the 17th and 18th centuries, it was assumed that these citizens were limited to white propertied males, but gradually this concept of citizenship, and with it civil rights, was extended to all adult men, and eventually to adult women.

Slavery was incompatible with this idea of rights. It was gradually abolished, although more for economic than for humanitarian reasons. Although guaranteed by their relationship to particular political communities, these rights were seen in Enlightenment thought as 'natural'; that is, grounded in the fundamental nature and dignity of the human person. The rights of those not able to be responsible citizens also received protection; children, the sick, the mentally ill or retarded, the imprisoned. Some 19th century English liberals and progressive Evangelicals began to claim that rights should be extended to animals as well. Beating, torture and painful ill-treatment of all kinds should be banned, whether toward humans in prisons, schools, armies or hospitals, or toward animals in laboratories or farms.

Both environmentalists and animal rights activists today draw on this tradition of 'natural rights'. They seek to extend this concept of species and ecospheres and to sentient animals. Environmentalists argue that endangered species have the right to be protected against extinction, not simply because they are or might become useful to human, but in their own right, as unique expressions of evolutionary life. Animal rights activists argue that sentient animals have the right to be protected against abuse, not simply because it is bad for humans to do so but in their own right, as beings that have the capacity to feel. The capacity to feel pain and pleasure, rather than the possession of the capacity to think rationally and to act morally, become the base line for the right to protection against abuse. Some animal rights thinkers go farther and claim that
sentient animals have an absolute right to life, just like humans. They should not be killed for meat or to use their skins for fur or leather.4

Animal rights activists have faulted the Christian scholastic tradition, as well as Cartesian philosophical dualism, for the Western traditional of instrumentalization of animals. Traditional Catholic thought represented by Thomas Aquinas argued that animals lack rational souls and exist to be used by humans, but not as ends in themselves, while Descartes claimed that animals lack any real sentience. Their cries and writhing in pain are mere mechanical reflexes. This view justified modern laboratory experiments on animals.

I agree with the view that animals should be protected against pain and abuse in laboratories and farms. I also believe that there is a mandate for a mostly vegetarian diet and a major reduction in animal raising for meat or skins, but primarily in terms of just distribution of food between humans and preservation of land from overgrazing. I stop short of the claim of the absolute right to life of animals since I think that we cannot avoid a basic ambiguity of existence in which to live one must eat what was once living.

Despite the Biblical vision in which the lion lays down with the lamb and the wolf eats straw like the ox, the carnivore cannot be banished from nature. We should greatly reduce, for both health and for justice reasons, the carnivore in ourselves, but need not banish it absolutely. Like many indigenous people, we should use animal flesh sparingly, thanking the animal whose life we take to feed our own. Evolutionary science has abolished the arrogant belief that human consciousness separates us absolutely from animals. They are our ancestors and our distant kin. Like the Hebrews, we should use care in spilling their lifeblood, for it is the same blood that runs in our veins too.

One must also ask whether the natural rights tradition is adequate for the ecological ethic, we need today. Protecting an animal or a plant because it is a member of an endangered species is still a highly individualistic idea. Species are not endangered in isolation, but because the ecosystems of forest, prairie or wet-land in which they live are endangered. It is ecological communities that are the context in which particular animals or plants thrive or die.

It is finally all ecosystems, not just wild ones, but the ones in which humans must learn to share their lives with a great variety of animals and plants, that have to be protected. We need an ethic that encompasses the sustaining of ecological community, not simply the members of community in isolation from each other. The natural rights tradition is limited because it sees only the right of the individual in relation to the community, but fails to uphold the community the matrix in which the life of the individual is sustained.

This reflects the failure in Western thought to bring together the democratic and the socialist traditions. Although hostile to the atheistic aspect of modern socialism, Catholic social ethics has something to contribute in its stress on the balancing of rights and responsibilities and the setting of social ethics in the context of community. What is needed is a new interconnection of the ethic of the individual and the ethic of the community, and the extension of this ethic beyond the human individual and group to the biosphere in which all living things cohere on the planet.

The basic insight of the Biblical covenantal tradition that we have to translate right relation into an ethic, which finds guarantees in law, is an essential element in building an ecological world order. In the World Charter for Nature, signed by all members of the United Nations (except the United States) in 1982 laid out the basic
principles of such an ecological ethic. International treaties on climate change, protection of biodiversity and forests, the oceans and lakes, are being negotiated to set limits to human abuse of the environment. A body of international law is beginning to emerge, although all too slowly and without adequate means of enforcement, that affirms the interdependency of the global human community with the earth community of air, water, animals and plants.

The Sacramental Tradition

The sacramental tradition of Christianity complements the covenantal tradition that has been emphasized by Reformed Christianity and its secular heirs. It starts with the community as a living whole, not only the human community, but first the cosmic community. The human being, not only mirrors cosmic community as micro to macrocosm, but also intercommunes with the complete cosmic body. God is seen not only over against and “making” this cosmic body, but as immanent within it. The roots of this tradition lie in a Hellenistic cosmological philosophy that brought together ancient Near Eastern cosmogonic story with Greek philosophy. Hellenistic Judaism incorporated it in its vision of divine Wisdom as the secondary manifestation of God and God's agent in creating the cosmos, sustaining it and bringing all things into harmonious unity with God. Strikingly, Hebrew thought always saw this immanent manifestation of God as female.

Wisdom...pervades and permeates all things...She rises from the power of God, the pure effluence of the glory of the Almighty...She is the brightness that streams from everlasting light, the flawless mirror of the active power of God and the image of his goodness. She is one but can do all things, herself unchanging, she makes all things new: age after age she enters into holy souls and makes them God's friends and prophets....She spans the world in power from end to end and orders all things benignly.

(Wisdom of Solomon: 8)

In the New Testament, this cosmogonic Wisdom of God is identified with Christ. Jesus as the Christ not only embodies, in crucified form, the future king and redeemer, but also incarnates the cosmogonic principle through which the cosmos is created, sustained, redeemed and reconciled with God. In this cosmological Christology, found in the Preface to the Gospel of John, in the first chapter of Hebrews and in some Pauline letters, Christ is the beginning and end of all things.

In the letter to the Colossians, the divine Logos, which dwelt in Christ, is the same Logos, which founded and has sustained the cosmos from the beginning. "All things have been created through him...and in him all things hold together". This same Logos, through Christ and the Church, is now bringing the whole cosmos to union with God. "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him God is pleased to reconcile himself with all things, whether on earth or in heaven" (1:16-29).

New Testament and patristic cosmological Christology was a bold effort to overcome the threatened split between the God of Creation and the God of eschatological redemption, found in agnostic systems such as that of Marcion. This theology sought to
synthesize cosmogony and eschatology, and bring together the Hebrew creational and the Greek emanational views of the relation of the divine to the cosmic body. Being and Becoming are dialectically interconnected. The Greek body-soul dualism was made more fluid; by seeing body was the sacramental bodying forth of soul and soul the life the life principle of the body.

Irenaeus, the second century anti-gnostic churchman, sought to spell out the cosmological Christology of the New Testament in a comprehensive vision of redemptive history. The visible cosmos is itself both the creation and the manifestation of the Word and Spirit of God. The Word and Spirit are the ‘two hands’, by which God creates the work the ground and principle of being of the cosmos.

Human freedom allows this connection to the divine source of being to be forgotten, and human relation to God and to each other is being other is distorted. However, God continually sends manifestations of the Word and Spirit that heal this relationship, culminating in Christ, whose work is now carried to fulfillment in the body of Christ, the Church. For Irenaeus, the Christian sacraments are the paradigmatic embodiments of this process of cosmic healing. The body itself, human and cosmic, is thereby regenerated, renewed and filled with the divine presence, which is its ground of being. Irenaeus sees the entire cosmos becoming blessed and eventually immortalized by being ever more fully united with its divine source of being.

Later Latin Patristic thought gradually dropped the lush prophetic visions of a redeemed earth that were part of early Christianity as being too dangerous to an empire that now claimed to be Christian. But medieval Latin thought, represented by thinkers such as Bonaventure, preserved elements of the idea of a cosmic presence of God through which we can be led upward in the “mind’s road to God”. Sacramental Theologians of the Victorine School set their reflections on the sacraments of the Church in the context of the sacramentality of Creation. Although late medieval nominalism deepened the epistemological and ontological splits between natural and 'supernatural' being, begun in Thomas Aquinas, Renaissance Platonism saw a full-scale revival of an emanational cosmology.

The “natural magicians” of the Renaissance, such as Paracelsus and Giordano Bruno, proposed theories of medicine and science based on the harmonies and sympathetic interactions of all levels of being, the human miscosmos interrelates to the plants, animals, minerals and metals of the planet and reaches out to the planets, stars and galaxies. Although their tradition was defeated by the dualists of mind against matter Descartes and Newton, the effort to bring mind and matter, God, spirits and living beings together in one unified vision lived on and was continually rediscovered in traditions of European philosophy, theology, poetry and art.

The Cambridge Platonists and the Jewish philosopher Spinoza expressed this effort to bridge mind and matter, God and cosmos, in the 17th century; Fichte, Schelling and Hegel in the 18th and 19th. In poetry, it was expressed in the English romantics, Coleridge and Wordsworth; in theology in Tillich’s view of God as ground of being. Ecological theologians of the late 20th century, such as Thomas Berry, or Matthew Fox’s rediscovery of the cosmological Christ, represent the new impetus to rediscover and reinterpret this tradition of sacramental cosmology.

Thomas Berry draws part of his inspiration from Teilhard de Chardin, the French Jesuit paleontologist whose writings, due to a Church ban, were only published after his
death in 1955. Tielhard attempted a bold synthesis of cosmological Christology and scientific evolution. The inward organizing energy of matter is itself seen as spirit, the first level of the expression of that spiritual power which appears as life and then as consciousness, as matter grows ever more complexly organized in cells, organisms and the human brain.

Once the development of conscious thought is reached, evolution takes place through social organization, rather than organically. From the neolithic revolution, there arose a limited number of classical civilizations in favorable regions around the world. From the Renaissance to the 20th century a new stage of modernity is transforming all surviving neolithic, as well as classical cultures, into a global unity. Through technology, a new stage of global communication and consciousness is becoming possible, or what Tielhard calls, the 'noosphere'.

Tielhard sees this evolution toward a planetary consciousness as the gradual emergence of planetary soul or the cosmic Christ. As an increasingly collective consciousness develops, he speculates that eventually the organic substratum of the planet will die away, and the communal consciousness, born from organized matter, will live eternally. The universe is giving birth to God. There are problems with this Tielhardian perspective, both his confident assumption that the Eurocentric line of development was the privileged line of global development, to which all other cultures would give way, his failure to see the negative side of technology, and finally his ultimate acceptance of mind-matter split. Thomas Berry has sought to correct these defects in Tielhardian thought. Berry sees need to integrate of just discard the ancient neolithic, as well as classical Asian, cultures which preserve wisdom about healthful ecological living that Western culture forgot.

Berry sees human-nature relations deeply threatened by Western technological exploitation. He calls for a deep metanoia that is necessary to bring about a new ecological consciousness. This metanoia must encompass many levels. These include technological, social and cultural. For Berry, Western people are caught between the older stories of classical civilizations and the confident mechanistic scientism of modernity, both of which are under challenge today, and a new spirituality, rooted in the new universe story, that is waiting to be born. We need to create a new socio-economic incarnation of the human species into its earth matrix. Although the technological aspects of this are necessary, the most important shift must be a new vision of our relation to the whole of the creation, a new way of telling the story of who we are.

I wish to concentrate the conclusion of this paper on the meaning of this new ecological consciousness. What are the elements that would go into an ecological spirituality and ethic? First, we need to dismantle our dualistic concepts of reality is split between soulless matter and transcendent male consciousness, as if this consciousness originated from another world, and not from this earth. We might start by revisualizing the relationship of mind or human intelligence to nature. Mind or consciousness did not fall out of a bodiless, transcendent world and temporarily occupy bodies.

I find compelling the Teilhardian view of mind as the expression of the radial energy of matter, at a high level of complexity. Human consciousness is where evolving and increasingly organized matter becomes conscious of itself. We need to think of human consciousness, not as separating us from the rest of nature, but rather our special
gift, both to rejoice to be the place of the cosmos' self-awareness and also to use to harmonize our needs with those of the rest of nature.

Such a reintegration of human consciousness with matter will reshape our understanding of God. Instead of modeling God after alienated, male-identified consciousness, outside of, disconnected with and ruling over the cosmos, the understanding of God in ecological spirituality needs to reclaim in a new way the sacramental vision of God as the ultimate source, sustaining ground of inter-connection and future horizon of that radial energy which itself wells up into organized patterns, manifest as atoms, molecules and organisms which become increasingly self-animating and conscious.

If human awareness is where the radial energy of matter itself become self-aware, we can say that the Thou of the universe her/himself become conscious in human consciousness, and we commune as transient consciousnesses with the great Thou of the whole cosmic process. We need to affirm three truths important together; the transience of organic selves, the living interdependency of all things and the value of the personal in communion.

Our capacity for consciousness allows us to roam through space and time, remember past ages, and explore the inner workings of beings on earth or on distant planets. And yet the self of this consciousness is transient, ephemeral, utterly dependent on a fragile organic material base of existence that will disintegrate back into material elements, to be reassembled in new forms, as well as upon the sustaining Ground of Being, within which this whole process of coming to be takes place.

As many spiritual traditions have said, we need to 'let go of the ego'. This means to accept the transience of our individual selves. At the same time, we rejoice in our time to be a personal center of being, acknowledging and communing with other personal centers of being around us, and becoming for a season the place where the personified center of being of the whole cosmos is self-aware. How this individual self is taken into the Great Thou and given permanent meaning is a mystery. The appropriate approach to this mystery is one of trust in the divine source of all from which we come and into whom we go, rather than seeking to 'preserve our lives' by our own powers.

In this awareness and communion, compassion for all living things should fill our spirit. In the ecstatic moment, we encounter the energy of the universe that sustains the dissolution and recomposition of matter as the Great Thou, the heart and mind that knows and loves us even as we reach out to know and love. We may call her/him many names. Mine is Sophia, Holy Wisdom. In such words, we point to the personal center of the whole cosmic process which all the small centers of personified being manifest and express.

The small selves and the Great Self are called to become community. As the Holy one bodies forth in us, we are each called to respond by our bodying forth in creative activity. We are also called to repent of a positing of our existence that sets us against the other beings in creation, and thus ultimately against God, destroying our earth home. We are called to manifest our creativity in a way that affirms the life of each in communion, sustaining the earth community generation after generation. Only in this metanoia of creative selves in communion can we renew the earth as a community of life that mirrors the community of God in us and us in God.
Endnotes

1. A major source of the condemnation of the Bible as the source of the Western culture of domination is Lynn White's essay, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis", Science (10 March, 1967), pp. 1203-1207.


