

THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

By

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To my grandparents

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This project investigates the human dimensions of sustainability specifically analyzing whether, and how, religious and spiritual discourse informs the cultivation and maintenance of inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable political processes. The question animating this research was: How prevalent is the *religious dimension of sustainability*, and what are the differences between the ways in which religious groups and secular groups understand sustainability? My conclusions are that historically, this religious dimension has been an important ingredient in several understandings of sustainability. Pragmatically, the inclusion of religious values in conservation and development efforts facilitates sustainable relationships between people with different value structures, and increases chances of long-term success.

Most informants resonated with the idea that they possessed a profoundly affective affinity for biological, ecological or cosmological interdependence. In these cases, the moral sensibilities of these sustainability leaders were informed by this emotively-charged affinity. Another central idea commonly expressed by sustainability advocates was the importance of translating sustainability-oriented narratives between differing constituencies. The first common theme is conceptual, the second strategic or practical. The language, metaphor and imagery utilized to transmit these common themes in the public sphere generally derived from one of

three sources: existing religious groups and their cultural production, the natural sciences, and the social sciences.

These religious and spiritual themes, practices and metaphors function as cognitive tools in sustainability discourse. The leaders that are the focus of this study encode the central themes of sustainability into spiritualized narratives which act as cognitive tools aimed at stimulating the transition toward sustainability. In the end, what seems most crucial for working toward sustainability is not agreement on spiritual or religious commitments, but a commitment to making an accurate articulation of those spiritual or religious commitments to individuals and communities who do not resonate with the same values.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **The Stakes of Sustainability**

Public intellectual Stephen Prothero argued that “religion is now emerging alongside race, gender, and ethnicity as one of the key identity markers of the twentieth century” (2007: 7). The concept of *sustainability* is also emerging as a popular term that in some cases acts as an identity marker, often used as a shorthand reference to a complex set of socio-politico-economic problems and possible solutions. As sustainability expert and educator Anders Edwards put it, sustainability is linguistic shorthand linking “the central issues confronting our civilization” (2005: 133). My research lies at the intersection of these two contested twenty-first century identity markers: religion and sustainability.

As resources grow scarcer, and populations and consumption of those resources continues to increase, a rise is expected in inter-group conflict (Klare 2001). This project investigates the human dimensions of sustainability specifically analyzing whether, and how, religious and spiritual discourse informs the cultivation and maintenance of inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable political processes. Simply put, the primary question animating my research was: How prevalent is the *religious dimension of sustainability*, and what are the differences between the ways in which religious groups and secular groups understand sustainability? Related sub-questions included: Are there any values that obtain across religious and secular sustainability-oriented constituencies? Can understanding the religious dimensions of sustainability aid in reducing human suffering and inter-group conflict? What are the most commonly cited values, or reasons expressed for why movement leaders became engaged in sustainability advocacy? Finally, how are these values expressed to others in the public sphere?

While uses of the term sustainability abound in popular culture, business, higher education, government and development and conservation programs, there has been a dearth of attention to what I call the religious dimension of sustainability. In short my conclusions are that historically, this religious dimension has been an important ingredient in several understandings of sustainability. Pragmatically, in many cases, the inclusion of religious values in conservation and development efforts facilitates sustainable relationships between people with different value structures, and increases chances of long-term success.

It is the dizzying variety of different understandings of sustainability that prompted philosopher Bryan Norton to propose a new “constructive” social science research program, one engaged in developing “a new kind of integrative social science” (2005: 291). Norton recognizes that pluralism inevitably leads to “a range of values from consumptive to transformative to spiritual” (2005: 373). Language related to some values, such as religious values, however, is relevant only *within* particular communities of accountability and not applicable to public policy debates.<sup>1</sup> Most of the people I interviewed engage in deliberation or partnerships with others precisely *because* of their religious beliefs and values, not in spite of them. This goes against the grain of Norton’s claim that such commitments to risky partnerships (commitments to negotiate with others outside one’s familiar communities) are “*independent of the particular beliefs and values of the participants*” (2005: 285, italics his). In fact, in many

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<sup>1</sup> I use the phrase “communities of accountability” throughout to refer to the various nested, hierarchically arranged communities to which individuals hold themselves accountable to differing degrees. Individuals are accountable to their own visions of self in the world (personal values), to their families, various local groups (churches, book clubs, dining groups, etc.), to nation-states, organizations (i.e. Greenpeace, Unicef, Conservation International, etc.) and loosely affiliated identity groups (rock climbers, surfers, peace activists, engineers, doctors, etc.) that transcend national and international boundaries. Each of these has religious dimensions, provided religion is defined broadly enough (a task I turn to in chapter two). I picked up the phrase communities of accountability from its use by theologians who draw on narrative understandings of ethics (see for example Gula 1989). Communities of accountability are the groups whose stories provide the framing and motivation to help individuals meaningfully navigate the worlds they find themselves thrown into (to use Orsi’s phraseology [1997: 8]). Individuals perceive differential accountability to these different communities, and make ethical judgments in part by making inferences about the norms associated with these communities.

cases they are directly related, and hiding this from public eyes may hamper the process of public debate.

When oil companies, international political bodies, the Sierra Club, radical environmentalist and indigenous organizations (and everything in between) can all use sustainability (or some variation of it) to describe their agendas and goals, it is vitally important that there be more focused investigation into particular deployments of the term and the values these uses imply. The importance of exposing the values at play in various definitions of sustainability becomes especially clear in a pluralistic global context, where those who provide the funding and institutional support for sustainable development programs have in mind a concept of sustainability that is not only foreign, but often unwelcome to those who are the “targets” of such development. For example, some conservation and development agencies assume that raising standards of living in a sustainable manner requires engagement with the global market. In contrast, the idea of sustainability may be deployed by indigenous or other marginalized groups as a strategic term designed to resist incorporation into the global market and its attendant values (Wright 2009; Trusty 2009). The current “moral austerity” of environment-related policy making cannot be overcome without making these values foundations explicit (Gilroy and Bowersox 2002). If sustainability itself is to be a long-term cultural project, these values require more attentiveness, and different communities of accountability require more practice at translating them into the public sphere.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, anthropologist Robin Wright has noted that in many cases, religiosity may either facilitate or hamper the success of sustainable development projects, depending on the resonance of such religiosity with the values of the granting or funding bodies (2009). In these cases, religion is certainly an important factor in sustainability.

## **What is Usually Missing from the Discourse: the Religious Dimension of Sustainability**

Most treatments of sustainability begin by defining what the term means. Some of these definitions of sustainability describe particular approaches to development (WCED 1987), represent alternatives to existing development practices and socio-political arrangements (Sumner 2005; Hawken 2007), or suggest that sustainability is best measured in terms of empirical data such as biodiversity (Lovejoy 2002; Patten 2000). Development-related definitions, however, too often pay inadequate attention to the perpetuation of existing global power imbalances. Counter-hegemonic definitions can make the mistake of dismissing or downplaying the power of the nation-state to promote social change, a conclusion that Michael Kenny and James Meadowcroft call “rather short-sighted politically, and suspect intellectually” (Kenny and Meadowcroft 1999: 2). Finally, scientific definitions, which often offer preservation of biodiversity or other scientific measurements as central to achieving sustainability, may simply shift the locus of power from nation-states and corporate elites to the scientific “experts” who can design and implement policy in a values vacuum.

Such definitions are relatively ineffective when they are used as lenses to assess sustainable living arrangements that depend on locally adapted (and historically situated) knowledges, or to account for non-economic variables. Incorporating alternative sources of knowledge and locally adaptive social norms within the Western policy-making purview is increasingly the focus of scholarly investigation, and may prove to be a crucial input to the formulation of sustainable policy outcomes. As anthropologist Scott Atran put it, “Environmental management increasingly involves diverse groups with distinctive views of nature. Understanding ways in which local cultural boundaries are permeable to the diffusion of relevant knowledge may offer clues to success with more global, multicultural commons” (2002:

422). Sustainability is a positive term forged to broker relationships between these cultural boundaries and their accompanying views and use of nature.

Thus, energies expended defining sustainability (WCED 1987; Baker 2006), discerning its central principles (Dresner 2005), or elucidating its foundational ethical tenets should instead be directed at understanding the central value structures of those who use the term, and the reasons for which it is deployed. These underlying values, many of which contribute to the religious dimension of sustainability, are important to producing successful policy outcomes. Moreover, though it has received little attention, I will demonstrate that this religious dimension has long been a pervasive feature of sustainability discourse.

## **Background and Methods**

### **Background**

My aim was to see what outcomes resulted from turning the Religion and Nature lens on an environmentally-inspired set of social movements.<sup>3</sup> Religion and Nature is a field that utilizes methods drawn from the social sciences as well as the humanities to illuminate relationships between the religious rituals and beliefs of humans and their habitats. These theories and methods have been turned on homesteading as spiritual practice (Gould 2005), environmentally friendly Catholic nuns (Taylor 2007), river restoration (Haberman 2007),

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<sup>3</sup> That is not to say that environmentalism was the only influence on sustainability-oriented social movements, but it was one of the most obvious and significant. I do not here define what I mean by “social movement.” Some would define a social movement as a group that shares a common set of values and acts in a coordinated fashion toward a particular set (or sets) of goals (i.e., Gerlach 2002). Others would likely argue that the very idea of a social movement presumes an epiphenomenal entity that has its own social and political inertia, and that such social “groups” are best envisioned not as sets of shared values but rather as distributions of mental representations (and I would add practices—see for example Sperber 1985, 1994). Atran et al. put it this way: “there is no systemically bounded or integrated culture as such. There is nothing at all grammatical or generatively rule bound about the relations that connect, for instance, language, religion, the nation state, and science.... There are only family resemblances to what is commonsensically referred to as culture (or religion or science), but no overarching or integrated structure” (2005: 749). My own understanding is closer to Sperber’s and Atran’s than to Gerlach’s, but I do believe that the idea of a social group or movement can act as a valuable heuristic device for understanding dynamics at broader levels, whether or not one endorses the accuracy of referring to a distributed set of mental representations and practices as representative of particular groups.

community agricultural practices (Peterson 2008), “dark green” religious production (Taylor 2009), wolf reintroduction (VanHorn 2008), and fly fishing and streamside restoration (Snyder 2008), to name a few.<sup>4</sup> While there has been some convergence in the attributes of the religious discourse among spatially and politically separated groups (i.e., Peterson 2008; Taylor 2009), this project focuses on a specific network of actors who occupy high level positions in various sustainability movements, and compares the use of religious discourse among religious and secular groups. Thus, this study provides an additional layer of reflection on how the religion and nature lens sheds light on religious social phenomena.

In his analysis of dark green religion Bron Taylor provided many examples from what he referred to as the *environmentalist milieu*, tracing the influence of dark green themes through both subcultures of resistance and international political venues. My focus here, the *sustainability milieu*, which is characterized by a human-centered ethos, a recognition of biological, ecological or cosmological interdependence, and an ethics of interpersonal empathy. This milieu was certainly influenced by environmentalism, including the kinds Taylor identified as “dark green.” My research, then, provides analysis of a sub-population that is in some ways broader and more inclusive than the environmentalist milieu. The methodology employed in this study, however, which involves engagement with a particular expert network and analysis of the manner in which they transmit the central themes related to the religious dimensions of sustainability, is narrower than Taylor’s. While Taylor’s analysis highlighted the global emergence of dark green religious themes which have contributed to international depictions of

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<sup>4</sup> For a history of the development of the related fields of Religion and Ecology and Religion and Nature see Taylor 2005c .

sustainability, this analysis focuses on particular groups, and specifically on high level actors within those groups.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond the significant influence of the above scholars and methods, there are three contemporary theoretical contributions that further explain how I have framed my project. The first is Scott Thomas's *The Global Resurgence of Religion* (2005), which argued that religious beliefs and practices have long been important to international relations, though they have rarely been scrutinized by scholars. The worldwide "resurgence" of religion is, according to Thomas, one of the "megatrends" of the twenty-first century (which parallels Prothero's idea [p. 1] that religion is one of the key identity markers of the twenty-first century) (Thomas 2005: 29).<sup>6</sup> Although Thomas's work is not explicitly related to sustainability, his application of Alasdair MacIntyre's narrative theory of ethics to international relations theory is useful for understanding how some of the stories that my informants used as cognitive tools for promoting sustainability are spread at the international level. In addition, Thomas's narrative approach highlights the importance of including religious beliefs and practices as an endogenous piece of the policy formulation process both locally and internationally. Thomas's contention that the global resurgence of religion is a *part of* cultural reactions to modernism suggests interesting parallels with sustainability, which is in many ways also a reaction to certain consequences of modernism (including unsustainable consumption, population trends, development efforts, and socio-

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<sup>5</sup> See chapter three, pp. 50-52 for more details, and Taylor 2009: 183-198 for what makes religious production dark green.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas defined the global resurgence of religion as "the growing saliency and persuasiveness of religion, i.e. the increasing importance of religious beliefs, practices, and discourses in personal and public life and the growing role of religious or religiously-related individuals, non-state groups, political parties, and communities, and organizations in domestic politics, and this is occurring in ways that have significant implications for international politics" (Thomas 2005: 26).

political arrangements) (Thomas 2005: 44).<sup>7</sup> This global resurgence of religion lies at the root of sustainability, and other empirical evidence of the persistence and spread of the religious dimension of sustainability grows from this so-called mega-trend. For example, much of the empirical evidence cited in this study as evidence of the religious dimension of sustainability includes: 1) the endorsement of environmentalist aims by some organized religions, and the parallel activities or behaviors in which sustainability advocates and religious adherent engage (i.e., feeding the poor, protecting endangered ecosystems, social justice, etc.); 2) political leaders' use of religious language in discussing the environment (i.e., the idea that nature is somehow sacred); 3) scientists' use of language or metaphors related to the sacred to describe their own work or findings; 4) the opposition by religious adherents and sustainability advocates to capitalism and modernism; 5) secular conservation groups' outreach to religious organizations; 6) the popularization of spiritualized sustainability-related narratives; and 7) the perceptible shift, at least among North American and Western European societies, toward lifestyles and practices that are more "sustainable" (for example the LOHAS segment of the population, a now widely recognized and powerful consumer group).

Second, Jonathan Benthall's *Returning to Religion* (2008) examined religious and parareligious phenomena as existing along a "weak" to "strong" *religious field*. Benthall argued that many NGOs, social movements, and academic disciplines operate on certain presuppositions that they take "on faith," and that most of them exhibit at least medium religious field characteristics. I take sustainability to be one of these religion-resembling social movements.

Finally, environmental philosopher Aaran Gare's work was helpful to understanding sustainability. Although his primary area of specialization is environmental ethics, Garè's

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas argued that the global resurgence of religion can be understood "as a parallel development in the developed world and in developing countries that is part of a wider, already existing, critique of global modernity, authenticity, and development" (2005: 44). Such development practices are now framed as *sustainable development*.

analysis suggested that diverse oppositional thinkers—those who challenge in a profound manner accepted scientific, social scientific or philosophical conventions—could (and in his view, should) be integrated in a coherent philosophy to demonstrate the continuity between them (Garè 1998; 1995). In a theoretical treatment reminiscent of Campbell’s concepts about the cultic milieu, Garè suggested that diverse oppositional subcultures have essentially advocated one of two alternatives to the modern model of human/nature interactions: *the cultural model*, which assumes that significant shifts in cultural values and priorities are necessary in order to combat the environmental crisis (Garè cited thinkers such as Giambattista Vico, Johann von Herder, Georg W.F. Hegel, and Karl Marx here), and *the naturalistic metaphysics model* (influenced, Garè said, by thinkers from John Duns Scotus to Baruch Spinoza and Gottfried Leibniz—and I might add Alfred Whitehead, David Bohm, David Ray Griffin and Fritjof Capra) (Garè 1998: 16-18). Garè argued that once integrated into a coherent *metanarrative*, this large-scale story should be systematically grafted onto existing mechanistic cosmologies, economics, psychology, biology and physics to promote positive change. My project analyzes the emerging metanarrative Garè predicted, suggesting that it has manifested in a loosely related set of social phenomena I refer to as sustainability movements. However, added to these “alternative” socio-cultural models are important contributions from mainstream corporations and government sectors, who do *not* represent alternatives to the prevailing socio-political arrangements, and who also utilize the discourse of sustainability to describe their own socio-political agendas.

To further focus the study I specifically investigated one particular network of experts spanning religious, interfaith and secular NGOs located within the United States and Western Europe (though in some cases their work is global in scope), noting the religious dimensions of their activism and seeking to understand the sources of religious themes in sustainability

discourse and how they are used by different groups. In Chapter 10 I provide an analysis of how different theories of individual action in relation to environmental degradation can be integrated into a useful methodological tool for investigating social movements with religious dimensions.

## **Methods**

To investigate how ideas and practices related to sustainability were tied to religious belief and practice I began by conducting broad literature reviews covering sustainable development and contentions about the term, the role of non-governmental organizations in conservation and development, environmental ethics, grassroots sustainability movements, and religious environmentalism. I also cultivated relationships with people involved with sustainability advocacy, attending events and talking informally to people involved in various professions or fields related to sustainability. I began conducting semi-structured interviews with leaders in some of these movements in December of 2007, and through outreach and in some cases a snowball technique, over the course of the next year conducted interviews and engaged in participant observation of several sustainability related conferences and events. My primary informants were twenty elite actors from religious, interfaith, and secular non-governmental organizations. Interviews were also conducted with academic analysts of sustainability, as well as with diverse participants at sustainability-related events in both formal and informal settings. In a pilot study in the spring of 2005, thirteen structured surveys coupled with six open-ended interviews were conducted with participants in one of the non-governmental organizations analyzed here (the Northwest Earth Institute, see Chapter 7). Though they helped to inform the methods used for this project, these participants will remain anonymous.

## **Common Themes**

Although nearly all of my respondents emphasized that the values necessary for achieving a sustainable society were locally-dependent, there were some general commonalities among the

themes that ran through the reports of sustainability advocates. First, most resonated with the idea that they possessed a profoundly affective affinity for biological, ecological or cosmological interdependence. In these cases, the moral sensibilities of these sustainability leaders were informed by this emotively-charged affinity.<sup>8</sup> Another central idea commonly expressed by sustainability advocates was the importance of translating sustainability-oriented narratives between differing constituencies. In other words, many of these sustainability leaders emphasized the need to approach political, social, or cultural “others” from a standpoint of weakness or humility, vulnerable (or at least willing to empathetically consider) others’ worldviews, values, and behaviors, what I refer to as an ethics of interpersonal empathy.<sup>9</sup> The first common theme is conceptual, the second strategic or practical.

### **Sources of Language for Deploying These Themes in the Public Sphere**

The language, metaphor and imagery utilized when these common themes were deployed in the public sphere generally derived from one of three sources: existing religious groups and their cultural production (Chapter 3), the natural sciences, and the social sciences (Chapter 4). The messages derived from these sources are vetted and translated within various sustainability-related social movements. When deployed in the public sphere they are embedded in spiritualized narratives.

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<sup>8</sup> The promotion of amorphous ideas of interconnectedness have been criticized by some scholars who suggest that they are either overly romantic, inapplicable to whole populations or sets of religious believers, or obfuscate human exploitation of ecosystem services (see Kalland 2005: 1368-1369). Nonetheless, they are frequently used to describe sustainability in the public sphere and should therefore be scrutinized.

<sup>9</sup> An ethics of interpersonal empathy is typically focused on engagement between individuals and constituencies on central values, motivations, and perceived future goals with the understanding that both sides undertake some sort of risk, whether the risk refers to challenging personal or communal worldviews, production and consumption habits, or social arrangements. I envision this ethic as similar in certain ways to what Sharon Welch refers to as a “feminist ethic of risk” (Welch 1990), for such engagements are often “risky.” The ethics of interpersonal empathy shares with Welch’s vision the notion that engagement with “others” requires relinquishing power over them to some extent, that an ethics of risk is grounded in community, and that the risks taken are strategic (for Welch’s definition see p. 20). However, Welch sees such engagement as ultimately grounded in an ethic of resistance. In the cases examined here such an ethic may be undertaken by those in power in an effort to cede power to “others” in a spirit of cooperation, or may be used to solidify existing power arrangements.

Interestingly, there was some consensus among my respondents regarding the manner in which such religious narratives were expressed. First, the values associated with sustainability and coded into narratives are used strategically to intentionally modify behavior, perception and policy. Second, nearly all of my respondents believed that core values were of utmost importance to good policy-making (challenging the post-metaphysical social scientific methodology suggested by Norton, above). Third, storytelling seemed to be an important and prevalent (at least among the small network of actors analyzed here) component in the transmission of the values related to sustainability, and in the long-term viability of on-the-ground projects. These value-laden stories contribute to the cultivation of a religious metanarrative of sustainability, often grounded in an optimistic, empathetic anthropocentrism. In effect, these stories act as discursive devices, or cognitive tools for the spread of normative sustainability-related ideas.

### **Transmission of Sustainability Narratives**

Reviewing the transmission of these narratively-grounded cognitive tools, it is clear that they are passed from individual to individual, and that leaders in various sustainability movements (the targets of my fieldwork) are some of the primary “evangelists” who spread the sustainability metanarrative. These stories are exchanged between subcultures of resistance and mainstream culture, between grassroots level groups and international organizations, and between religious and secular groups (these themes are more fully developed in Chapters 3, 4 and 8). I trace some of the pathways for the transmission of these values-laden stories.

Religion scholar David Chidester argued that something is doing religious work when it is “engaged in negotiating what it means to be human” (2005: 18), and shaping the public sphere by “forming community, focusing desire, and facilitating exchange” (5). The concept of sustainability is certainly engaged in generating community, supervising exchange relations, and

providing goals toward which particular communities aim. Even when the language of sustainability advocacy is not explicitly religious, in many cases it reflects core values and deep beliefs of particular individuals, communities or groups, and when deployed in the public sphere, it is performing religious work.

To unpack the religious dimension of sustainability, I first have to wrestle with the key terms, religion and sustainability (Chapters 1 and 2), and then trace the sources of language used to characterize sustainability in the public sphere (Chapters 3 and 4). I also focus on interviews with elite actors in the non-governmental organizations listed in Table 1-1.

Each of these organizations and the individuals who lead them utilizes religious narratives in the public sphere in order to further their understanding of sustainability. Anna Peterson has suggested that what distinguishes religious narratives is “that they incorporate in some way the sacred: forces, ideas, and events with meaning, location, or value—or all three—beyond (but not necessarily opposed to) the human” (2001: 19). Despite the differences in perceived applicability of the term, such religious values and narratives seem to be present and in many cases important across these various sustainability-oriented constituencies.

Table 1-1. Categories of NGOs examined in this research

	Religious	Interfaith	Secular
National/International	Evangelical Environmental Network	Alliance of Religions and Conservation	Conservation International; Natural Capitalism Solutions
Grassroots/Local	Northland Church (Longwood, FL);	Interfaith Power and Light	Northwest Earth Institute

## CHAPTER 2 DEFINING THE TERMS: RELIGION AND SUSTAINABILITY

### **Introduction**

Does the term “religion” lose some of its usefulness if its boundaries are conceived as broad, permeable, and imprecise? I believe that religion can retain its analytic utility if defined broadly provided such definitional extension sheds light on why a particular set of beliefs, values or behaviors matter to particular persons. I am specifically interested here in how religion functions in the context of sustainability.

Sustainability is a strategy of cultural adaptation to the dynamic interplay between ecological and social systems that is often tethered to religious narratives that elucidate how to make such survival strategies meaningful. Thus, the deployment of sustainability can be a socio-political identity marker since it refers to what it is those who use the term believe is required to live meaningfully over the long-term. Religion has been a crucial ingredient in the feedback loop between cultures and their environments historically, and there is some evidence (though debatable) that its inclusion in ecosystem management planning is important for long-term success. To understand whether or not religion is a help or hindrance in planning for sustainable subsistence, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the term religion.

### **Using Religion as a Multi-Faceted, Therapeutic Tool<sup>10</sup>**

Religion plays a dual role in the sustainability movement: a) it takes the shape of formal, institutionalized religious structures and their members who advocate (and implement)

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<sup>10</sup> I use this term below in discussing what philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein imagined the primary goal of philosophy to be, namely alleviating confusion about language, a sort of linguistic therapy. Nancey Murphy (2000) used Wittgenstein’s concept of a therapeutic philosophy to hash out the differences between the proper domains of science and religion. I suggest that philosophical analysis of how religion functions within a sub-set of a particular population (such as sustainability movements) may be helpful because religion is a term that is often used as popular shorthand for referring to a widely variable set of core values and deep beliefs. It is possible that clarifying which of these values is at stake in particular debates may help to generate more sustainable cultures, making analyses of the deployment of the term religion a sort of social therapy.

sustainable practices, and b) it is implicated in varied and loosely related systems of values that coalesce around a “new” ethic, concept of the place of humans in the natural world, or sort of society. Each of these is considered new to the extent that it provides an alternative to traditional development-oriented definitions of sustainability (which are often imagined to promote increasing inequity and ecological degradation), or to the prevailing (and typically loosely defined) paradigm of modernity (which constructs binary oppositions, mechanistic portraits of nature and human nature, and speaks of reality in terms of universals) (for examples of this critique of modernity see Merchant 1980; Capra 1982; Berry 1988; Garè 1998, all of which influenced various participants in sustainability movements). To the extent that these cultural sustainability narratives draw on the language of core values and deep beliefs and trigger emotive responses in people they are doing religious and political work. Using the analytical term *religious* to describe an often overlooked dimension of sustainability helps to provide a richer assessment of some facets of sustainability movements.

### **Religion as a Non-essentialist, Multi-factorial Category**

Religion, at least within sustainability movements, functions (as does sustainability) as a multi-faceted tool. The way religion is understood and used by particular people in particular places to describe their actions and motivations reveals something about what they hold sacred.<sup>11</sup> When religious metaphor and language are utilized in the public sphere, they function to chip out sharper portraits of individual and community identity. All invocations of religion, as religion scholar Russell McCutcheon argued, erect or perpetuate oppositions (i.e., profane/sacred, irreligion/religion, insider/outsider). He noted that such conceptual binaries are useful, but can

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<sup>11</sup> As Wittgenstein put it, “How does an ostensive definition [of religion, in this case] work? Is it put to work again every time the word is used, or is it like a vaccination which changes us once and for all? A definition as a part of the calculus cannot act at a distance. It acts only by being applied” (1974: 39). Likewise, a definition of sustainability takes its meaning in large part from the specific circumstances in which it is deployed.

cause trouble if “understood as normative, self-evident, and naturally privileged rather than as strategically, intellectually, and socially useful” (1997: 66). Anthropologist Benson Saler made the similar point that religion is instrumental in generating and sustaining community, but in so doing it simultaneously places some outside of that community, however conceived (Saler 1999: 74). Jonathan Benthall concurred when he argued that “the definition of religion is political. It is a legitimating claim, a discursive strategy” (2008: 8). Religion, in other words, has no essential element that marks it off as morally significant and spiritually relevant. It is a tactical term used to describe deeply seated values and beliefs and mark them off from others’ values, but is also used to refer to the study of these socio-political dynamics in the Academy.

For example, Jonathan Z. Smith investigated the history of the term in academic usage, influentially arguing “‘religion’ is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore it is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept” (Smith 1998: 281; see also Smith 1988: 233). Smith meant that rather than being a term self-applied by all communities to describe their rituals, beliefs and practices, religion should be viewed as an analytical term whose meaning depends on the person (or community) using it, and on the questions they use the term to illuminate.<sup>12</sup> As McCutcheon understands Smith’s meaning, religion “is part of the data to be explained because as they are commonly defined religious discourses remove something (a claim, an institution, a practice) from history, thereby privileging it over all other historically embedded claims and knowledges” (2001: 136).

According to Smith and McCutcheon religion is not a native term because its use isolates and authenticates certain practices or features of culture as religious, without due recognition that

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<sup>12</sup> Note that I’m not suggesting that the term is illuminated—that the meaning of religion is discerned—but that the use of religious language, metaphor, or perspectives in relation to social problems indicates which problems are “deep” enough to warrant the use of religious language. Smith notes that typically, the person or group applying the labels of religion or religious are outside the communities described in this manner (1988).

what “counts” in this category depends upon a particular understanding of the prototypical features of *religion*. These prototypical features, which cast boundaries around what counts as religious have derived from particularly Western ideas which are not always applicable to the spiritual lives of cultural others.

In some other respects then, religion *is* a native term—it is native to Western culture. The term is also used widely now by those outside Western culture, in many cases by people and groups who have adopted it to refer to certain cultural phenomena for the purpose of engaging in cross-cultural dialogue. So while the term is not native to most indigenous peoples, for example, they have adapted it to reflect their own core values and deep beliefs for their own ends. Religion is neither a self-evident set of phenomena, nor a thing that *is* essentially this or that—and yet it is a term that carries tremendous political import, particularly among those for whom it is *not* a native term. Anthropologist Daniel Dubuisson argued,

Religion was intimately linked to the principal events and to the major orientations of our intellectual history (when it was not literally identified with them),...because it has contributed for centuries to the discipline of our bodies and our minds, because it has the design and patterning of our cities, because it has cultivated our manner of looking at the world...and because it has been put at the heart of the principal debates and controversies affecting the definition of humanity as well as the destiny of the world. *So religion, as outlined above, must be considered the locus in which the identity or figure of the West has in principle been constituted and defined*” (36-37, italics mine).

Tomoku Masuzawa’s *The Invention of the World’s Religions* (2005) advanced a related argument that the emergence of the “comparative religion” research program (made famous by Mircea Eliade, but whose origin lies with the fathers of the social sciences<sup>13</sup>) grew from the cultivation of Western power in the colonial and post-colonial eras. Masuzawa noted that for

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<sup>13</sup> The gendered noun is intended. I refer to the likes of Max Muller (2002 [1890]), Karl Marx (1978 [1845]), E.B. Tylor (1883), James Frazer (1959 [1890]), Emile Durkheim (1972; 1995), Sigmund Freud (1918), and Carl Jung (1968). Clifford Geertz credited the fathers of the study of religion (Freud, Durkheim, and B. Malinowski) with creating a repetitive field of study that, drawing on Janowitz, he called an exercise of the “dead hand of competence” (1973: 88).

hundreds of years the planet's population was imagined as consisting of only "Christians," "Jews," "Mohammadens," and "the rest." The appearance of the "world's religions," while seemingly a solid step toward pluralism "neither displaced nor disabled the logic of European hegemony—formerly couched in the language of the universality of Christianity—but, in a way, gave it a new lease" (Masuzawa 2005: xiv). Masuzawa argued that the spread of the term to other cultures perpetuated the colonial project by forcing a term with a Western intellectual heritage on others.

Some scholars may underestimate the agency of those who have intentionally and strategically adopted, adapted, and re-deployed the term religion for their own ends. Nonetheless, the points discussed here are important ones: religious discourse builds boundaries, facilitates formation of community, and even when utilized by those who are not dependent on the West's intellectual heritage, reflects values and beliefs that are tied in significant ways to cultural mores and behaviors.

Thus, religion is strategically, intellectually, and socially useful in several contexts, both for Westerners and non-Westerners who have adapted the term as a means of explaining their lifeways to others. Some religious studies scholars have adopted a methodology less indebted to exploring what people *believe* than to noting what people *do* with their religious categories. Russell McCutcheon's response to an audience question at a conference is illustrative: following his presentation he was asked whether he meant that religion was "*also* social, biological, political, economic, and so on, or whether [McCutcheon] was saying that religion was *only* social, biological, political, economic, and so on." McCutcheon's answer: "Only. Next question?" (2001: x). McCutcheon may have been unduly provocative in his response, but his point is significant: that for scholars of religion (not caretakers of the term) analysis should focus

not on supposed internal subjective states and beliefs, but on the effects that these beliefs, values and practices have (through their believers) in the real world. According to this understanding of the field, scholars of religion should attend to subjective states to the extent that they are affirmed by persons or communities, rather than searching for an essentially religious facet of experience or thought abstracted from people in particular places.

McCutcheon's response and research agenda can be related to a group of scholars who argue that the study of religion should be conceived as a "materialist phenomenology of religion" (Orsi 1997: 8). Religion scholars David Hall, Robert Orsi and others have advanced a methodology that allows for the investigation of affective states through empathetic observation or participation, but contextualizes these observations by attending to socio-political circumstances. In other words, the study of religion should not focus on what people believe (subjective states envisioned as somehow separated from action), or how supposed worldviews shape behaviors. Rather, the focus should be *on* their behaviors, and their *self-reported* (either in print, or on person) values rather than on evaluating a priori metaphysical assumptions.<sup>14</sup>

According to the above scholars, building a bounded definition of religion is less important than learning what it means for particular people. Ludwig Wittgenstein, for one, has questioned whether providing a solid definition of any term is necessary for understanding:

We are able to use the word "plant" in a way that gives rise to no misunderstanding, yet countless borderline cases can be constructed in which no one has yet decided whether something still falls under the concept "plant." Does this mean that the meaning of the

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<sup>14</sup> Cases where a priori metaphysical assumptions guide research might include earlier scholars such as Rudolph Otto, who suggested that religious experience was grounded in a *mysterium tremendum*, or Eliade, who argued that religion was a cultural phenomenon that reflected encounters with something objectively real in nature called *the sacred*. More recent examples might include scholars who claim that followers of this or that religion (say, Islam) would naturally behave in a particular fashion if they were *authentic* believers (say, authentic Muslims). McCutcheon (2005) has provided an extended critique of overbroad and essentialist understandings of Islam following the attacks on the New York City World Trade Centers on 11 September 2001. Claims of this sort may tell more about those who imagine and endorse them than they do about those who are studied by looking through such lenses.

word “plant” in all other cases is infected by uncertainty, so that it might be said we use the word without understanding it? Would a definition which bounded this concept on several sides make the meaning of the word clearer to us in *all* sentences? (1974: 73).

Many have used the term religion to refer to institutional manifestations of religion (those confined by buildings and traditions), as well as more commonplace and everyday experiences of affectively-grounded communion with others (even, as religion scholar David Chidester has [2005], referring to baseball or live music performance). In my understanding of religion, all of these uses of the term religion “count.” As Saler put it, “if we deem admission to a group (as comprehended by the category religion) to be a matter of ‘more or less’ rather than a matter of ‘yes or no,’ then an argument can be made for admitting ‘secular religions’ and ‘quasi-religions’ as peripheral members” (Saler 2004: 230).<sup>15</sup> Many different communities to which individuals are accountable have religion-resembling features, though none of these particular features is alone *necessary* to trigger the use of the term religion.<sup>16</sup>

Drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein, it is possible to envision the term religion as referring to a host of often overlapping and cross-fertilizing *families* of religious practice, experience, and function. Saler and Benthall also both utilized Wittgenstein’s family resemblances model to analyze religion, with Saler suggesting that the term “religion” is an instance of what Wittgenstein called a “concept-word” (Saler 1999: 197; Benthall 2008: 46-80; see also Vasquez

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<sup>15</sup> Using the same theories that Saler utilized more than a decade earlier, Benthall argued that “Linguists have developed the idea of ‘prototype semantics,’ whereby the applicability of a word to a thing is not a matter of ‘yes or no,’ but rather of ‘more or less.’” Further, he said that “these criteria may be graded” (Benthall 2008: 21). If some aspects of human lives contain more religion-resembling features than others, we may find that “some religions, in a manner of speaking, are ‘more religious’ than others” (Saler 1999: xiv), though this “more” does not refer to a greater authenticity, but rather a closer resemblance to one or more prototypes of that category.

<sup>16</sup> Anthropologist Jeremy Benthall (2006; 2008) and religion scholar Bron Taylor (2009) use the term “para-religious” to describe these religion-resembling features. Taylor has indicated that he believes the term para-religious avoids some of the potentially pejorative connotations associated with the term quasi-religious. He believes that the prefix “quasi” implies that it is somehow inauthentic, or not really religious. These distinctions are unimportant to any case I wish to make here, so the terms quasi-religious, para-religious and religion-resembling are used interchangeably.

2008).<sup>17</sup> Envisioning “religion” as a concept-word means that it can act as an analytical tool, referring to pools of elements that tend to cluster together in different ways, and which typically are also strongly related to other things that are not religious (Saler 1993: 213). Conceptualizing religion in this way “facilitates going beyond religion [as synonymous with institutional practice and creed] and attending to ‘the religious dimension’ of much of human life” (214).<sup>18</sup> Religion is intimately intertwined with many facets of human lives that are not themselves essentially or explicitly religious, including sustainability advocacy and conservation behaviors, both of which figure prominently in my research.

### **Religion as a Therapeutic Concept**

Bron Taylor adopted Saler’s adaptation of Wittgenstein by using a *family resemblance* approach to defining religion in contemporary religion and nature discourse, proposing sixteen families of religious characteristics (Taylor 2007: 15-17; 2009: 4-5).<sup>19</sup> The characteristics listed contain recognizable elements from many of the “classic” definitions of religion, including those formulated by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1996 [1799]), Max Muller (1870), E. B. Tylor (1883),

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<sup>17</sup> As Wittgenstein put it, “This argument [about what it means to ‘understand’ a concept-word] is based on the notion that what is needed to justify characterizing a number of processes or objects by a general concept-word is something common to them all. This notion is, in a way, too primitive. What a concept-word indicates is certainly a kinship between objects, but this kinship need not be the sharing of a common property or a constituent. It may connect the objects like the links of a chain, so that one is linked to another by intermediary links....Indeed even if a feature is common to all members of the family it need not be that feature that defines the concept. The relationship between the members of a concept may be set up by the sharing of features which show up in the family of the concept, crossing and overlapping in very complicated ways” (Wittgenstein 1974: 35; see also Saler 1993: 197).

<sup>18</sup> In a later work Saler elaborated, stating that “A scholarly model of religion, as I conceive it, should consist of a pool of elements that scholars associate with religions. Not all will be found in all religions. Some will be more typical of what we mean by religion than others, both in terms of distributions and weightings. And many will be found outside of the purview of what scholars conventionally designate as religions” (2004: 230).

<sup>19</sup> Taylor uses such a definition to suggest that scholars should attend to as many of these “families” as possible in their work. In *Conceptualizing Religion* Saler compares the virtues and pitfalls of both family resemblances (derived from linguistic philosophy), and polythetic classification (derived from biology), arguing that both tools would likely have what he calls a “practical convergence,” producing similar results when applied to a term such as religion (1999: 170). In the end, however, the family resemblance model, coupled with “prototype theory” is Saler’s preference. For criticisms of the family resemblance approach, see *Perspectives on Method and Theory in the Study of Religion: Adjunct Proceedings of the XVIIth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions* (Geertz and McCutcheon 2000, especially the review symposium on Saler’s book, pp. 287-337).

James Frazer (1959), Emile Durkheim (1965), Max Weber (2005 [1930]), William James (2002 [1902]), Rudolph Otto (1958), Mircea Eliade (1959), Clifford Geertz (1973), Stewart Guthrie (1993), Talal Asad (1993), and also some newer ones (Saler 1999; Benthall 2006, 2008). If all of these varied sets of characteristics “count,” from substantive definitions to functional ones, from subjectively-derived definitions to those that suggest religion is a product of society, it allows analysis of a wider range of social phenomena with a religious studies lens than would otherwise be the case. It is possible, for example, to attend to the “religious dimension” of social movements while withholding judgment about where they fall on the “more to less religious” continuum. Envisioning religion as a pool of loosely related elements allows analysis of how the religious dimensions of social movements help to forge community, facilitate exchange, and focus desire (Chidester 2005). Such flexible categories make “language-games” with certain concept-words possible.<sup>20</sup>

For Wittgenstein, concept-words were not important simply because of their flexibility, but because this flexibility allowed for their therapeutic deployment in language games. Wittgenstein envisioned “freezing” language by facilitating new relationships between concept-words.<sup>21</sup> Wittgenstein put it nicely when he said that “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of our language” (2001: 109).<sup>22</sup> Philosophy and language-games are tools for adapting perceptions and behaviors to the worlds humans find themselves thrown into, a task with which religion is also concerned (Orsi 1997: 8). It is

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<sup>20</sup> For concept-words see note 16, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> Wittgenstein states that “the task of philosophy is not to create a new, ideal language, but to clarify the use of our language, the existing language. Its aim is to remove particular misunderstandings; not produce a real understanding for the first time” (Wittgenstein 1974: 72).

<sup>22</sup> “Language-games, as Wittgenstein conceived them,” Saler phrased it, “are exercises through which we can rid ourselves of the ‘mental mist’ which tends to enshroud our ordinary uses of language” (1999: 236).

important that scholars expand the definition of religion to include many families of religion-resembling activity, but it is perhaps more important that they recognize *which ones* are being deployed by *which groups* for *what ends*. Language-games resist freezing boundaries on words or concepts, and it is in and around the worded nodes of language-games that language becomes “part of an activity, or of a life-form” (Wittgenstein 2001: 23).<sup>23</sup> It is in these creative zones that old understandings of words and language are challenged and new ones forged precisely because of the elasticity of meaning in such language.

Parallel to the discussion of how to approach sustainability below, treating the term religion as an element in a language-game can turn critical attention on the ways in which the deployment of such terms (religion and sustainability) create and sustain (or challenge and erode) socio-political relations. In cases where the religious dimension of sustainability is involved, language-games can really be said to grow into what anthropologist Scott Atran and his collaborators referred to as “spiritual games,” where cultural mores are “played with” and massaged into new meanings for particular communities of accountability.<sup>24</sup> In the cases examined by Atran et al., “players” in spiritual games include the non-economic values of ecological services, social relations and non-human subjectivities, all of which provide valuable inputs into individual and collective decision-making (2002; see also Benthall 2008: 50-51).<sup>25</sup> The employment of the affective power of religion-resembling cultural features in the name of sustainability may be a therapeutic tool for negotiating identity, community, and belonging in

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<sup>23</sup> In *Philosophical Grammar* Wittgenstein adds “Is meaning then really only the use of a word? Isn’t it the way this use meshes with our life? But isn’t its use a part of our life?” (1974: 29).

<sup>24</sup> Anthropologist Scott Atran refers to the “spiritual games” that communities play whereby non-economic values of ecological services, social relations, and non-human subjectivities are important ingredients for individual agency, calling into question traditional forms of decision theory and game theory (2002).

<sup>25</sup> The authors argue that their findings challenge traditional understandings of decision theory and game theory.

democratic societies. It is from deployments in particular circumstances that any term takes its meaning, and in turn adds levels of meaning to its future uses.<sup>26</sup> Fundamentally, religion, like sustainability, is about dealing with cultural, ethnic, and ethical “others” in effective ways.<sup>27</sup> Typically, it is by risking something of themselves (not necessarily personally, but on the level of community norms and values) that people are able to achieve success in sustainability through partnership.

For analytical purposes here, religion will serve dual roles as it does in folk understandings of the term.<sup>28</sup> On the one hand, it will be used to refer to institutional religions, their authoritative hierarchies, traditions, practices and places. The so-called “world religions” have undoubtedly played a major role in sustainability discourse, and their combined membership attests to the social and financial pressures they have brought to bear on promoting sustainable practices. On the other hand, the term religion will also describe some of the self-reported motivations of sustainability advocates, the growth of religiously-tinged sustainability-oriented material culture, the circulation of both individual experiences and group narrative within communities, and the communication of these communities of accountability with other outside groups. Through the interplay of these two dimensions, a third sort of religious production emerges, couched in the metanarrative of sustainability. Simply defined, a metanarrative is a story that justifies another story. The story of sustainability (conceived of in

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<sup>26</sup> Wittgenstein suggests that concepts, propositions, and words are all part of the calculus of language, and wonders what it means to make them sensical, “how do we do it?—We can indeed turn it [the concept of religion, for example] into quite different things; an empirical proposition, a proposition of arithmetic..., an unproved theorem of mathematics..., an exclamation, and other things. So I’ve a free choice: how is it bounded? That’s hard to say—by various types of utility, and by the expression’s formal similarity to certain primitive forms of proposition; and all these boundaries are blurred.” Likewise, our words are defined primarily by our free use of them, whether we are using them as scholars, or in other capacities.

<sup>27</sup> By “ethical others” I mean those who adhere to different value sets and sources of moral authority.

<sup>28</sup> For treatments of religion as a “folk category” and part of a “folk psychology” see Johnson (1993) and Benthall (2008: 7-9).

various ways by different constituencies) acts as a benchmark against which other cultural “stories” can be weighed, for it is within the sustainability story that these cultural stories are set in the context of the ecological matrix upon which they depend. Analysis of the transfer of religious messages through and across various constituencies, from subcultures of resistance to international political and economic regimes, uncovers something interesting about the sustainability movement: it cultivates as an integral part of its sustenance affective and often religious language and metaphor. If, as I argue here, religious language, metaphor, and motivations serve as the medium through which these different constituencies continually generate and sustain the metanarrative of sustainability, analysis of the religious dimension of sustainability may also reveal something interesting about the people who participate in sustainability initiatives.

### **Sustainability in Three Dimensions**

There are three common elements that most existing definitions of sustainability typically include: the ecological/environmental dimension, the social equity/justice dimension, and the economic/capital dimension. By way of example, note Robert Costanza and Carl Folke’s broad goals for sustainably managing ecosystems:

1. ensuring that the scale of human activities within the biosphere is *ecologically sustainable*
2. *distributing* resources and property rights *fairly*, both within the current generation and for future generations, and between this generation and other species.
3. *efficiently* allocating resources as constrained and defined by numbers 1 and 2 above (1997: 49-50).

Folke and Costanza’s concise statement of goals provides one example of how the three dimensions of sustainability are typically deployed together. Educator Andres Edwards likewise reviews the “Three E’s” of Sustainability: 1) ecology/environment; 2) equity/equality; and 3)

economy/employment (2005: 21-22).<sup>29</sup> He adds an extra “E” for “education,” but he also acknowledges the centrality of these three “pillars of sustainability,” as they are commonly portrayed today (*see fig 2*).

Separating the idea of sustainability into three dimensions is somewhat artificial (and is often exposed as such when applied to specific real world situations).<sup>30</sup> But the dimensions can act as valuable heuristic devices for discerning the various streams of sustainability advocacy at work today on the global citizenry, national and international political structures, and the values that underlie them. Rather than imagining these as discreet, or separate “compartments” for sustainability, perhaps it is more helpful to say that when all three dimensions (regardless of whether they are prioritized or range in degree of importance) are present in a social movement, a community vision, a mission statement, a government policy, a building policy, a business plan, an educational curriculum or standard (or what-have-you), this is evidence of something related to the quest for sustainability.

### **Sustainability in Four Dimensions**

The working definition used for this project, which guided my inquiries into, and analysis of sustainability is this: Sustainability is a strategy of cultural adaptation to the limitations imposed by the dynamic interplay of ecological and social systems, couched in large-scale stories that illustrate how to persist within habitats in a manner that provides genuine affective fulfillment now, and for the foreseeable future. It is not merely subsisting within ecological limits. Sustainability cannot, and should not be described as a concrete goal to be “achieved.”

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<sup>29</sup> Even at the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education Conference in November 2008 I heard several references to “the three E’s,” though mention was also often followed by another, “newer” way of referring to these three dimensions, such as the “triple bottom line,” or the “integrated bottom line.” But the idea of these three pillars is clearly still significant in many circles.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, most professional sustainability practitioners now typically refer to these three dimensions collectively as the “integrated bottom line.”

Rather, it is a conceptual device for connecting core (and often religious) values to community narratives, positing an ideal state toward which political processes, exchange activities, and social formation move. This definition connects the dots between the aforementioned three dimensions of sustainability, but also foregrounds the importance of a fourth dimension: the religious dimension.

As sustainability practitioner Anders Edwards put it, sustainability discourse helped to unify, at both popular and official levels, four concerns:

- 1) an awareness of the profound spiritual links between human beings and the natural world; 2) a deep understanding of the biological interconnection of all parts of nature, including human beings; 3) an abiding concern with the potential damage of human impact on the environment; and 4) a strongly held commitment to make ethics an integral part of all environmental activism (2005: 14-15).

Edwards was suggesting that these four concerns underlie, and manifest positively in the dimensions he lists as the “E’s” of sustainability. More importantly for my purposes here, in a mainstream sustainability text whose intended audience included business people and educators the author attached spiritual values to a “deep interconnection” with nature, environmental activism, and ethics, and suggested that these spiritual values are fundamental to the idea of sustainability. In fleshing out her definition of sustainability, Jennifer Sumner invoked the notion of interconnectedness and empathetic forms of knowing, saying that achieving sustainability is ultimately dependent upon collectively understanding what the Buddha said in his first sermon: “Everything depends for its origination on everything else at once and in unison” (102). Paul Hawken also suggested that the movement is drawn forward by the “spiritual deeds” which inform and improve the moral imagination (2007: 188), in the end arguing that “what will guide us is a living intelligence that creates miracles every second” (190). These brief examples begin to illustrate the importance of more carefully identifying and characterizing the discursive and physical sites where religion is tied to sustainability. Let me

now unpack the claim that this fourth dimension is crucial to understanding sustainability by detailing how some others have defined sustainability.

The most well-known definitions of sustainability describe particular approaches to development (WCED 1987) or represent alternatives to existing development practices and socio-political arrangements (Sumner 2005; Hawken 2007). Others have developed definitions that are either self-consciously adaptive, or that describe flexible sets of sustainability “principles” that can guide the search for sustainability over time (i.e. Norton 2003, 2005; Edwards 2005). These latter definitions, in my judgment, have two advantages. First, they are historically conscious, acknowledging the storied nature of all knowledge (that is, they prioritize political processes, recognizing that the context and content of political deliberation may change over time). Second, such models acknowledge that any normative discernment derives from participation in particular communities of accountability, from the familial to the global.<sup>31</sup> These nested communities, to the extent that they offer up values for assessment and revision in the public sphere, contribute to the shape of the metanarrative of sustainability.

Philosopher Bryan Norton, for example, argued that “[sustainability’s] meaning...is intimately tied to the values of the community that uses the term. This view is contrary of course, to that of economists and others who seek a ‘purely descriptive’ concept of sustainability” (2005: 386).<sup>32</sup> Norton offers what he calls a *schematic definition* of

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<sup>31</sup> The idea that any rational moral discourse derives from within particular reasoning communities can be traced, at least within contemporary philosophy, to Alisdair MacIntyre, whose influential books *After Virtue* (1984) and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1989) argued that modern moral philosophy had lost its sense of “telos,” or purpose, which can only be provided by a particularistic form of reasoning imparted by participation in a community. This “narrative” approach, in which a common “story” is endorsed by a community as endowed with ethical import, was also popularized in moral theology by scholars such as Stanley Hauerwas (1981), William Spohn (2000), and many others.

<sup>32</sup> By “purely descriptive,” Norton means a concept of sustainability that uses a universal formula to achieve sustainability in particular situations, by—to use one example from ecological economics—assigning contingent values to ecological entities, and summing the costs and benefits of preserving or exploiting them. Purely descriptive definitions of sustainability may be helpful in some cases, but for Norton, they are inadequate in the long

sustainability, which includes as foci four categories of “sustainability values”: 1) community-procedural values, 2) weak sustainability (economic) values, 3) risk-avoidance values, and 4) community identity values (365-371). The first is concerned primarily with the political processes that allow appropriate values to be vetted for community analysis and revision. The second attends to economic assessments of values, acknowledging their importance for both human well-being and political traction. The third refers to creating opportunities to increase social resilience when faced with both external and internal disruptions. Finally, community identity values are those embraced by particular communities of accountability and which they find to be central to what it means to belong to that particular community. Such a schematic definition

characterizes and relates the key components of a definition [of sustainability] while leaving specification of the substance to those components open. Speaking schematically, we can say that sustainability is *a relationship between generations such that the earlier generations fulfill their individual wants and needs so as not to destroy, or close off, important and valued options for future generations* (363, italics in original).

The plurality of values that might be included in the categories above, Norton argued, include consumptive values, transformative and spiritual values<sup>33</sup> and everything in between, and allows for their variation over space and time (373). Thus, filling in the content of these categories with specific (and locally dependent) values is an exercise in solidifying the identity of a particular community and supervising their exchange relations.<sup>34</sup> In short, Norton views sustainability as an active, pragmatic, and comprehensive (politico-socio-economic) philosophy

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run since they do not attend to the other important types of values that he believes are essential for sustainability (2005: 379-399).

<sup>33</sup> Norton does not define these types of values.

<sup>34</sup> Given the definition of religion I offered, Norton’s notion of sustainability is doing religious work to the extent that it is forging community, shaping exchange and focusing desire. It is important to note that I am not claiming, as Kevin Elliot has done (2007) that Norton’s definition is in part “metaphysical.” Norton (2007) I think has adequately answered Smith’s charge. Religion, as I define it here, need not imply the addition of a metaphysical layer of reality.

of adaptive management.<sup>35</sup> A schematic definition depends on vague categories of values that by themselves neither exhaust the values invoked in sustainability advocacy, nor stand as *the* central values needed to achieve sustainability. They can instead be considered as nodes in a complex web of sustainability values, called on by different people for deployment in particular situations and times.

The provisional definition of sustainability I offered above resonates most with this adaptive, process-oriented definition with one important exception. For Norton, religious or spiritual values are included in his fourth category of “community identity values.” Yet Norton’s claim that language related to some community identity values should be confined within communities (and not vetted in the public sphere) is insufficient to account for the deeply affective and politically charged use of religious values in the public sphere. Thus, I am suggesting a fourth dimension be added to the traditional conception of the three dimensions of sustainability to acknowledge that at the very least religion is an important ingredient in defining and implementing sustainability. This religious dimension of sustainability reaches across the other three usually cited dimensions of sustainability, indicating its presence and prevalence across sustainability discourse (see Figure 2-2).

Depending on who deploys the term, sustainability may involve: caring for the poor, social advocacy, or civil disobedience; generation of local economies, the creation of intentional communities, local purchasing and slow food movements, or back to the land movements; revising methods of economic exchange, micro-lending, or economic restructuring for lower

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<sup>35</sup> Norton’s grasp of the relevant literature across a range of disciplines is noteworthy and he has a gift for building productive bridges between them. For example, he makes use of the philosophy of adaptive management, pioneered by C.S. Holling and H.T. Odum at the University of Florida, with special attention to the role of hierarchy theory (derived from general systems theory) as understood by Holling. Adaptive management allows for the evolution of models over time, and the inclusion of hierarchy theory provides some sensitivity to spatial scales. They are joined with a pragmatic philosophical approach that focuses on democratic processes.

throughputs; protecting indigenous rights, preserving languages, and cultural diversity; restoring denuded ecosystems, rescuing plant and animal regimes, and creating wildlife corridors; sharing technology and cleaner production techniques, alleviating food and water shortages, and planning for increased resilience in the face of future shortages; establishing fair labor laws, ensuring that such labor is meaningful and productive for particular habitats, and management of markets for the local good; encouraging more holistic and transdisciplinary educational arrangements, more sustainable administrative structures, and more ecologically and socially sensitive education, and a host of other activities that attempt to increase ecological, social, and exchange resilience. Institutionalized religious groups have been participants in or advocates of all of these activities, and some scholars have pointed to the spiritual dimensions of many of those that fall outside of the bounds of conventional religions (i.e. Gould 2005; Daly 1980; Wright 2007; Taylor 1995; Jordan 2003; and Berkes 2008 [1999], to name a few). None of these activities or groups is definitive of the sustainability movement, though they all work toward sustainability. These widely variable activities can all be envisioned as “families” of sustainability-related practices, and each has its own sets of values.

I envision these as “fuzzy sets” of sustainability-related activity, related to what Wittgenstein meant when he suggested that sets of things (concepts or ideas) are understood as belonging to a particular family when they have one or more of a set of prototypical attributes of that thing.<sup>36</sup> Wittgenstein meant that there may be members of a set that resemble more of the prototypical features than others, but that hardly warrants making the claim that these attributes

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<sup>36</sup> By fuzzy sets I mean that they are categories of practices, values, and characteristics that maintain fluid and permeable boundaries, often related to other sets of practices, values and characteristics.

obtain across all items in that set.<sup>37</sup> The *use* of the term or concept itself is part of a language game—its deployment is partially constitutive of its unfolding meaning in particular situations (2001: 40).<sup>38</sup> Sustainability, then, is multi-factorial, encompassing many meanings with different histories and accompanying values. Identifying which values particular constituencies are invoking when they characterize themselves as involved in the quest for sustainability is the first step to understanding sustainability for that particular situation set.

I find this multi-factorial approach productive in defining sustainability because it coheres with the way I approach religion. It makes it possible to “see” sustainability in a number of social, economic, political, and other movements and programs, even where they are not explicitly *all about* sustainability (for example, the Christian constituencies discussed in Chapter 4).

The multi-factorial model allows closer focus upon an element that I believe is significant in sustainability discourse: the importance of meta-ethical debate. As political scientists Michael Kenny and James Meadowcroft have argued, “nearly all definitions [of sustainability] concede that it involves the re-orientation of the ‘meta-objectives’ of a given society—by raising questions about different possible social trajectories through which the society may move, and then by promoting some of these as more ‘sustainable’ than others” (1999: 4). Norton also addressed the importance of these meta-objectives when he argued that “individual preferences and social values—as well as the institutions that shape them—must be considered, and

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<sup>37</sup> Wittgenstein anticipates prototype theory when he wonders what a “typical” member of a set resembles. Is it not possible, he asked, to find “...say a schematic leaf, or a sample of *pure* green?—Certainly [it] might. But for such a schema to be understood as a *schema*, and not as the shape of a particular leaf, and for a slip of pure green to be understood as a sample of all that is greenish and not as a sample of pure green-- this in turn resides in the way the samples are used” (2001 [1953]: 15 (73)).

<sup>38</sup> Norton is a philosopher of language, and is certainly aware of Wittgenstein’s approach, though he does not deploy it specifically in his definition of sustainability.

modeled, as endogenous to the social process of environmental management” (2003: 409). For Norton, re-orientation of societal goals occurs within his fourth category of sustainability values: community-identity values (2005). Religious or spiritual values, Norton says, may be vetted within those particular communities, but cannot be reliably translated into the language of democratic politics. Indeed, for Norton, the whole point of focusing on political processes is to ensure that such subjective metaphysical commitments are not needed in formulating public policies that appease the majority in democratic populations (interview 3 January 2008). But if value preferences are to play such an important role in the policy formulation process, why should the deeply felt sources of such preferences and values, religious motivations, be excluded?<sup>39</sup>

My argument here is that such core values and deep beliefs are extremely important to a fully transparent policy formulation process, and that the moral austerity of environmental decision making cannot be overcome without making these values foundations explicit (Gilroy and Bowersox 2006).<sup>40</sup> If sustainability is to be a long-term cultural project, these values require more attentiveness, and different communities of accountability require more practice at translating them into the public sphere.

While Norton’s analysis utilized hierarchy theory to account for communities of accountability at different scales he did not detail at what level “religious” or “metaphysical” beliefs and values should fall out of the mix of normative information included in adaptive political processes. For example, presumably it would be fine for individual and even family identity to be tied to core religious beliefs and values. But they should not, in Norton’s account,

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<sup>39</sup> By “religious” I refer to deeply felt preferences, values and beliefs, which need not involve beliefs in supernatural beings or include large organizations.

<sup>40</sup> Gilroy and Bowersox’s book is an edited volume which includes contributions from Norton. However, Norton does not in that volume endorse the inclusion of the religious values I am highlighting here.

play a part in the normative machinations of public policy formulation. One might ask: At what point do these normative, religious values become too cumbersome for an inclusive policy process?

My interview work with dozens of high level actors in various sectors of the sustainability movement indicate that Kenny and Meadowcroft are correct: nearly all definitions of sustainability envision a re-orientation of the “meta-objectives” of a society, whether it is a new ethic, an alternative anthropology, or a new vision of where humans stand in relation to the rest of the world or cosmos.<sup>41</sup> If this is indicative of the movement as a whole, then Norton’s “community identity values” may be too limited to characterize what people mean when they talk about a new approach to ethics. To assume that the ripples of community values extend only within the bounds of the community misses the richly networked relationships among the various sectors of the sustainability movement. In many cases insiders are pointing these agreed upon community values outward to critique the larger culture, and its social trajectory. These values, then, may be held by communities, but when they are displayed and dissected in the public eye they inevitably impact popular culture (whether doing so through challenging prevailing paradigms, or reinforcing them).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> “New” and “alternative” are terms that advocates use to express what they feel is a new set of guiding principles and values that differ in significant ways from those held by the dominant culture. For examples of this language that range from counter-hegemonic social movements to mainstream development and international political institutions, see (Sumner 2005: 112; Hawken 2007; Goldsmith et al. 1972: vi; Edwards 2005: 2; Gollhofer 1999: 446; International Union for the Conservation of Nature 1991: 9; World Bank 2001: xxv; WCED: 1 [also quoted in Davison 2001: 32]).

<sup>42</sup> The instances of local and state school boards attempting to include caveats about the imperfections of evolutionary theory, or trying to include in science curricula the teaching of intelligent design, are an excellent example of how particular community values are deployed outside their native communities, impacting popular culture. One humorous and religiously-relevant result of these debates was the creation of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (FSM), a deity that through subtle subversion questions the imposition of one community’s values on broader subsets of the general public. For more information about the FSM see [www.venganza.org](http://www.venganza.org), which has recently become a lightning rod for evolution/intelligent design controversy in Crossville, TN. The original news story appeared in the Crossville (TN) Chronicle on 24 March 2008, but access to the article was denied when I tried to access it on 27 January 2009. For another article on the debate see [http://news.cnet.com/8301-13772\\_3-9906870-](http://news.cnet.com/8301-13772_3-9906870-)

The fourth, religious dimension of sustainability focuses specifically on the translation and transformation of values that occurs when different communities and their accompanying value preferences contact each other in political and social worlds. The importance of this additional dimension became increasingly apparent to me as I gathered qualitative data from people in various sectors of the movement who cited their own individual and community values *as well as values arising outside their own communities* as generative of a new sort of moral imagination. Far from remaining hidden from the public eye, these are the value sets that should be presented and debated in the public sphere. I am suggesting here that being honest about core values and deep beliefs in the public sphere can act as a sort of community therapy, invigorating the moral vacuum within which much political decision making occurs.

In this work I neither defend the value of religion nor suggest that it is the most important ingredient in the quest toward sustainable societies. Rather, I suggest that people who attend to sustainability in various ways often ascribe their motivation for doing so to core values and deep beliefs, many times describing them in religious language. In these cases they offer another category of, and emotive reinforcement for sustainability values. Thus, while I remain unconvinced that religion is or will be the key variable in motivating sustainable behaviors and lifeways, it is in many cases an important medium for the exchange of deeply held values between various constituencies (between subcultures of resistance and mainstream political bodies, for example). In addition, religious language is frequently used to endorse affective engagement with sustainability-related behaviors.

With this background in place, after a brief theoretical interlude, I will examine the development of the concept of sustainability and its intellectual foundations.

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52.html, or for a partisan perspective, see <http://itlovesyou.blogspot.com/2008/04/spaghetti-monster-retires-from.html>) (both accessed 27 January 2009).

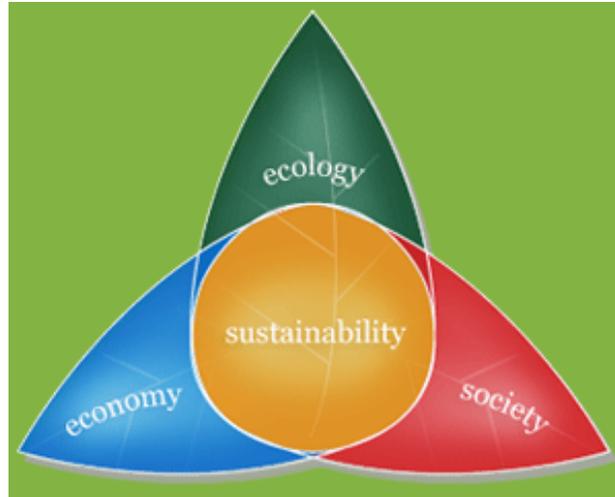


Figure 2-1. This is one representation of the three pillars of sustainability. Google reports at least 1,100,000 hits when the phrase “pillars of sustainability” is searched (search performed on 13 July 2008). Not all are germane, but it hints at the extent to which such ideas are circulated among various constituencies. This particular image was taken from the website of a development project that bills itself as “the largest sustainable development under construction in North America today.” By “development” they mean “housing development.” The community is in Baja, Mexico, and they profess to focus on ecological, social and economic sustainability (accessed 7 May 2008).

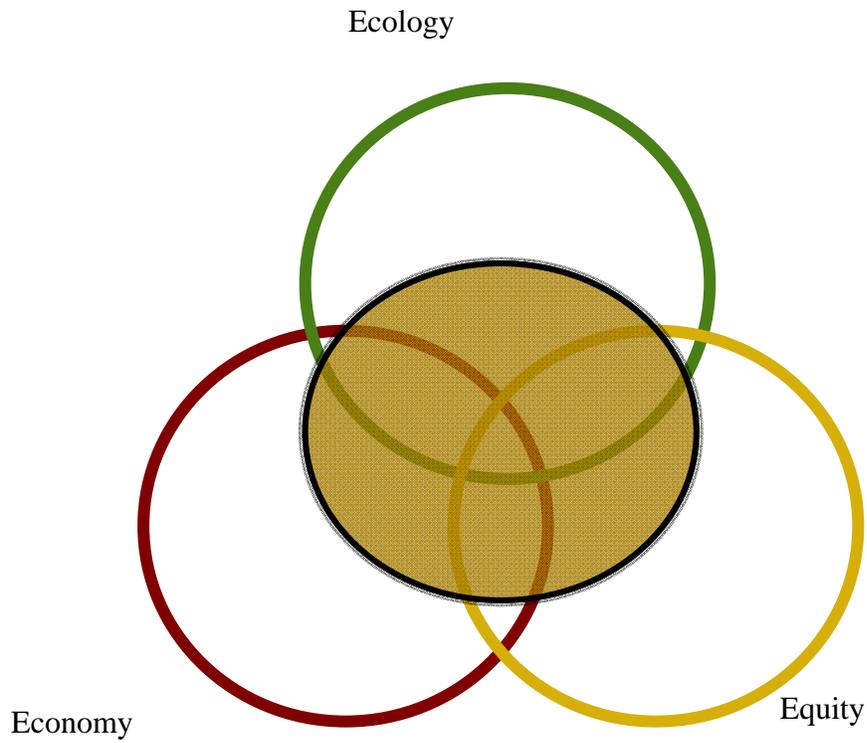


Figure 2-2. The shaded area represents the presence of the religious dimension across the other dimensions.

CHAPTER 3  
A THEORETICAL EXCURSUS: CLARIFYING METHODOLOGY

**Oppositional Milieus, Religion, and Cultural Transmission**

In 1972 philosopher Colin Campbell published a provocative essay about what he called the *cultic milieu* (Campbell 1972). His key insight was that different individuals and groups within oppositional subcultures engaged in a relatively free exchange of motivational metaphors and tropes, although they generally retained distinctive identities and sometimes even antithetical beliefs and goals.<sup>43</sup> Jeffrey Kaplan and Helen Loow's *The Cultic Milieu* (2002) took up Campbell's idea, highlighting how oppositional subcultures operated in an era of increasing globalization. The volume trained the theoretical lenses of the cultic milieu on phenomena such as radical environmentalism, neo-shamanism, ultra-conservatism, occultism and racists movements (to name a few). Cults thrive, and freely exchange ideas, however, only within a cultural medium that is conducive to the spawning of such cults (Campbell 2002: 14).<sup>44</sup> Campbell's original focused on a particularly rich era in the emergence of alternative subcultures (A. Geertz 2004: 37-70). Kaplan and Loow's volume grew out of a period of particular concern about the effects of globalization. In that volume, Bron Taylor adapted Campbell's theory by theorizing the existence of a global *environmentalist milieu*, which not only promoted information exchange between environmentalist subcultures but between such subcultures and mainstream individuals and institutions. In a cultic milieu where the characteristics and foci of

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<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, Gary Snyder made a similar claim, but called this loose affinity of countercultures "the great underground" (see Hawken 2007: 5).

<sup>44</sup> That is, according to Campbell, there must be *something* about the dominant cultural milieu that either structurally, intellectually, or academically facilitates the emergence of cults. Campbell contended that the concept of cult derives from a set of religious categories first made by Troeltsch, where a cult was associated with, and derived from the nature of mystical religion. The term was later used in a somewhat different way to refer to "any religious or quasi-religious collectivity which is loosely organized, ephemeral, and espouses a deviant system of belief and practice" relative to the dominant social culture (Campbell in Kaplan and Loow 2002: 12). I believe that both definitions are descriptive of at least some features of sustainability movements.

cults adapt to specific socio-political circumstances, it would be expected that in an age of eco-crisis there would be increasingly strong environmentalist and anti-globalization activity, and hybridity among participants.

Campbell's idea is helpful in imagining how ideas and metaphors are exchanged across disparate constituencies, but with Taylor, I believe that these sorts of exchange relations operate outside oppositional subcultures. Various sustainability movements in particular have created a space for what may well be a novel cross-fertilization of ideas between subcultures of resistance and mainstream policy-making bodies.

Taylor's analysis focused on dark green themes within the environmentalist milieu, and in some places traced the influence of these themes with international political venues such as the United Nations Earth Summits (2009).<sup>45</sup> These dark green elements were formative for and are certainly present within the sustainability milieu. The sustainability milieu as a whole, however, is certainly not dark green in the sense that much of the environmentalist milieu is, and in some cases does not appear to be very green at all. Many sustainability advocates do not consider themselves to be outdoor enthusiasts or advocates, and would not immediately or easily connect their understanding of nature to the ideas that the natural world contains intrinsic worth or sacred value. Yet many of these people would unhesitatingly use highly emotive normative or religious language to promote nature preservation if it promoted their vision of sustainability.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Dark green religion, according to Taylor, includes the following: endorsement of the idea of a metaphysics of interconnection, which is correlated with a non-anthropocentric ethics grounded in the intrinsic value of non-human nature, and a sense of obligation to behave in ways that inflict minimal damage on nature. Taylor formulated a typology that characterizes such dark green perceptions as either "Gaian" or "animistic," drawing on the ancient idea that the earth system is a superorganism or equally ancient ideas about the agency and inspiritedness of non-human natural entities. Light green constituencies may not resonate with any of these features of dark green religion, though many are prone to agree with the idea that there is a deep biological, ecological or cosmological interdependence more than the other concepts.

<sup>46</sup> This was clear not only from my formal interviews, but also from informal interviews and networking with sustainability advocates in various settings from 2001-2009.

Figure 3-1 illustrates the constituencies that make up the sustainability milieu. The dark green circle represents those who likely resonate with some form of nature-as-sacred religion or ideas about the intrinsic value of nature.<sup>47</sup> Light green sustainability participants are those who recognize some correlation between social justice and ecological degradation, but who would not assent to the idea that nature itself is sacred or has intrinsic value. This light green group is not biocentric, but could be characterized as being weakly anthropocentric.<sup>48</sup> The light brown circle represents those who advocate for sustainability but frame their activism in purely human-centered terms (economic or social terms, for example) with little or no consideration of nature having “its own good” or of any human obligations to non-humans. Those outside the sustainability milieu dwell in the dark brown circle, which represents those who typically do not support the central aims of sustainability or have affinity for those who reside within the green portions of the diagram. The sustainability milieu, generally speaking, retains a *human-centered* ethos that focuses on empathetic negotiation and personal and interpersonal responsibility. Thus, the focus here, what I refer to loosely as the sustainability milieu, extends the analyses of the scholars mentioned above and highlights the presence of similar themes even across groups perceived to be on opposite sides of the sustainability spectrum.

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<sup>47</sup> Individuals who resonate with a “nature-as-sacred” religion generally perceive that the entities and relationships that comprise nature (typically conceived as at least all organic and living entities, and sometimes non-living entities) taken together are inherently valuable and worthy of reverence. Certain forms of pantheism and other naturalistic religions, those that do not posit a supernatural agent or agents, would fall under this category.

<sup>48</sup> I refer to the form of weak anthropocentrism advocated by Bryan Norton (1984). Norton contended that the idea that humans can have a nonanthropocentric ethics is a confusion (let alone the best choice for a practicable environmental ethics). According to Norton, a weak anthropocentrism manifests in political outcomes that are no different than those arrived at from supposedly nonanthropocentric ethics, yet weak anthropocentrism avoids the philosophical pitfalls of attributing inherent worth or value to nonhuman entities (see also Norton 1991 for his “convergence hypothesis”).

## Cultural Transmission in Viral Form

This research seeks to document a loosely related set of social movements referred to as sustainability movements. The first stage of this research trajectory attempts to gather data about the religious language, metaphors, and motivational concepts employed by movement participants and supporters. One way to approach this inquiry is through interviews with networks of experts from different facets of the movement. Each of them carries significant influence within their own organizations (one of their primary communities of accountability). But they also interact with leaders from other groups, taking the experiences from these relationships back to their home communities. In so doing they are engaging in both religious and cultural production. My aim is to trace these mutual influences to illustrate how these “coalitions of the unlike” make progress in the quest toward sustainability.<sup>49</sup>

To illustrate how such cultural transference occurs, the political scientist Paul Wapner has argued that environmentalism is a social movement that generates a global, civic politics that is “above the individual and below the state yet across national boundaries” (2004: 125; 1995).<sup>50</sup> In order to understand the broader social changes initiated by environmental non-governmental organizations, he uses a “fluid model” of cultural production which “interprets activist efforts by noticing and analyzing...a ‘cultural drift,’ ‘societal mood,’ or ‘public orientation’ felt and expressed by people in diverse ways” (2004: 125). Sustainability movements cross national boundaries and can also be imagined as contributing to a cultural drift or public orientation, and could thus be characterized with a fluid model. Religion scholar Thomas Tweed has recently

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<sup>49</sup> This phrase “coalitions of the unlike” is used by Thomas Weber to describe collaborative conservation (1993), but I extend its usage here to groups engaged in the manufacture of sustainability discourse. I discovered Weber’s work through conversations about restoration with Sam Snyder.

<sup>50</sup> The first reference is a reprint of the 1995 article in the edited volume *Green Planet Blues* (Conca and Dabelko 2004), which originally appeared in the journal *World Politics* 47 (3).

used a fluid or “hydraulic” model of culture to describe the flows of religious beliefs and practices, which raises the possibility of whether such a parallel might point toward a theoretical convergence that might contribute to a social scientific analysis of the religious dimension of sustainability. Sustainability discourse has become a venue for the global transmission of a variety of ideas and practices (including religious ones), and these flows beg for more detailed investigation.

Manuel Vasquez is another religion scholar who has argued that “religion has become both a conduit for global flows and a source of the ‘scripts’ that crisscross various spatial scales” (2008: 158).<sup>51</sup> Vasquez urged careful scrutiny of these flows of practices, institutions, and artifacts, which he sees as tied to global commodities and financial exchange (156). In similar fashion, religion is integral to understanding the individual behaviors, social and political institutions, and the heterarchic exchange relations that are imagined as characterizing a sustainable global civilization. To a point, Vasquez’s treatment accords with Tweed’s hydraulic model, but Vasquez believes that Tweed’s analysis does not adequately attend to power dynamics within and between cultural groups. He proposes that envisioning these relations as networks helps to recognize the nodes where power dwells and the constrained possibilities that confront agents and groups who are parts of networks.<sup>52</sup> The use of network theory to describe

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<sup>51</sup> Here Vasquez quotes Arjun Appadurai, who suggests that these “scripts” are played out over several “scapes” that constitute the terrain of a globalizing world. Appadurai names five types of scapes: a) ethnoscapas; b) technoscapas; c) mediascapas; d) ideoscapas; and e) financescapas. Global “flows” occur in the disjunctures between these scapes. These scapes are perspectival constructs. That is, they refer to a group of related things or features that do not look the same from every angle (Appadurai 1996: 31).

<sup>52</sup> Vasquez’s argument is an important one, for analyzing cultural transmission without recognition of power relationships may highlight only one side of the story.

It is possible that the hydraulic model could be improved if it is imagined as a purely organic metaphor. Rather than imagining the fluid model as a set of random and unconstrained flows as in a sea, for example, perhaps it would be better to imagine the model as a riverine system, which is certainly constrained by geographical, geophysical and spatial boundaries. The river follows the geological features of the landscape just as sustainability and religion are dependent upon or reactions to the particular features of the national or geopolitical “powerscape.”

the environmentalist milieu has a history, and like the fluid model of cultural transmission, may be applied to the sustainability milieu also.

Sociologist Luther Gerlach published on the character of environmentalist social movements beginning in 1970 (Gerlach and Hine 1970; Gerlach 1971, 2002), noting that the most common organizational structure was neither entirely fluid and amoebic, nor hierarchical and bureaucratic. Gerlach proposed the acronym “SPINs” (Segmentary, Polycentric, Integrated Networks) to describe the most common structural features of these social phenomena. Such movements are segmentary because they are comprised of many diverse groups which grow, divide, die, fuse, etc.; polycentric because there are often multiple or competing leaders or centers of such movements; and networked because they form “a loose, reticulate, integrated network with multiple linkages through travelers, overlapping membership, joint activities, common reading matter, and shared ideals and opponents” (2002: 289-290). Gerlach argued that “movement participants are not only linked internally, but with other movements whose participants share attitudes and values” (296). This is evidenced in the relationships discussed in my case studies, and I would add that in the case of sustainability movements, movement participants are sometimes linked in various ways to others who *do not* share the same attitudes and values.

The mode of cultural transmission I describe in this study resonates with network models, but is perhaps best characterized by what some cognitive psychologists and anthropologists refer to as the “epidemiological model” of social transmission (Sperber 1985; Atran, Medin and Ross 2005). That is, it spreads from, through and to individuals and their networks like a virus,

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Such an organic understanding of a hydraulic model of religious transmission may be the functional equivalent of the network model. In addition, it should be remembered that people actively engage in social “engineering,” building bridges to other networks often over, or around the particular features of the “powerscape.”

striking those who are “primed” (or susceptible) in some way to receive the messages that sustainability advocates offer.<sup>53</sup> Sustainability, to the extent that it offers alternatives to prevailing norms, socio-political arrangements, and exchange relations, cannot therefore be transmitted primarily through cultures through sets of “shared” values or norms since they represent explicit alternatives to such cultural norms.<sup>54</sup> Themes related to sustainability are transmitted primarily through the interactions of the high level actors in each of these particular groups and movements, who share their information in an intentional effort to construct large scale narratives.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, studying the transmission of motivational tropes, metaphors, and language among actors in expert networks in disparate facets of the sustainability movement provides the first data set. Future research unpacking the cultural transmission of sustainability themes should include more extensive and deep qualitative work among other participants in the same organizations and communities, to discern to what extent the information transmitted by these experts “infects” the perceptions and behaviors of others.

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<sup>53</sup> I use the term “viral” to refer to the manner in which cultural transmission occurs, that is from person to person, and then through groups, rather than as larger level acceptance of sets of cultural norms. Stern et al. (1999) claim that people are primed to become supporters of or activists in particular social movements if they a) accept some or most of the values of the movement, b) believe these valued objects or ideas are threatened in some significant way, and c) believe that their individual actions can affect the outcomes. Just as a virus may contact and live within a host for some time before symptoms are activated, individual values and beliefs may be resonant with a particular social movement but may not activate if there is no perceived outlet for positive action. See chapter ten for further discussion of the sustainability “virus.”

<sup>54</sup> That is not to say that shared norms and values do not exist, but within the “sustainability” milieu an epidemiological model more closely fits the data (and this is possibly the case within the environmentalist and other cultural milieus as well).

<sup>55</sup> If this analysis is correct (and here I am indebted to Atran et al.’s analysis [2005]), this would be a strike against “meme theory,” at least as it is currently formulated by most of its proponents. Memes are theorized as hypothetical cultural units that operate analogously to genes, subject to cultural rather than genetic selection. Richard Dawkins popularized the idea in his 1976 work *The Selfish Gene*. Little progress has been made in unpacking the concept of memes, and thus they have remained primarily hypothetical constructs. Some (see Gers 2008) have argued that they may yet be saved by devising lists of memes that could conceivably be empirically tested as units of natural selection. However, it is difficult to see how devising lists of memes that obtain across cultures escapes existing critiques of structuralist approaches to anthropology.

The highly political religious dimension is a persistent part of the global flows of information across various constituencies related to sustainability. As the sources of language used to describe sustainability in the public sphere are revealed (Chapters 3 and 4) they provide some support to Vasquez's contention that powerscapes are important variables in determining the flow of such information. Sustainability discourse in the United States and Europe has affinities for particular metaphorical and imaginative discursive tools, many of which are derived from the natural sciences and religious systems that are either extant in, or romanticized by those in the industrialized world. Even when metaphors and imagery generated by those in the global South is vetted in the international political realm, it is typically related to events sponsored by or heavily invested in by several transnational corporate interests (such as the Johannesburg Earth Summit). Attention to how these themes are translated across oceans and cultures, then, will expose existing nodes of power within international political networks.

Gerlach's network model paired with this attentiveness to political power has explanatory power for large scale social dynamics. The biological metaphor advanced by Sperber and Atran, however, has greater explanatory power when describing how the values and practices that Gerlach analyzes on a societal scale are sustained and transmitted at the individual and group level. Together, they provide a theoretical backdrop for the analysis of the religious dimension of sustainability, and the political work it does by facilitating in the translation of values across constituencies.

These models of cultural transmission in concert with my description of the sustainability milieu extends the cultural and environmentalist milieu models, and provides the possibility of operationalizing how cultural transmission occurs. Noting the existence of these expert networks could provide a first step in identifying the content of several culture-specific learning strategies.

With these methodological caveats, I now turn attention to the ways in which distinct but highly interactive groups participate in the cultivation and spread of the religious dimension of sustainability.

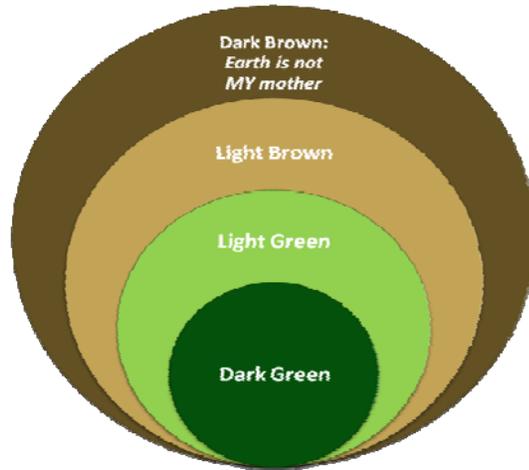


Figure 3-1. An illustration of the constituencies that make up the sustainability milieu.

CHAPTER 4  
THE GENESIS AND GLOBALIZATION OF SUSTAINABILITY

**Introduction**

Defining both sustainability and religion broadly as I have here allows a closer investigation of a number of historical, intellectual, and policy rivulets that carved their way across the cultural landscape toward the sustainability stream. In this chapter I will expose some of the roots of sustainability, which are often mentioned in passing by scholars who investigate sustainability, but are seldom brought to the surface. The ideas and concepts that lie at the roots of sustainability are heavily “spiritualized,” and usages of sustainability and its earlier cognates eventually manifested in what I call the religious dimension of sustainability.

For my purposes it is important to understand the values that were embraced by those who first deployed these terms in the public sphere, and the way these values have been digested and re-deployed for, and by leaders of sustainability movements and the general public. I will highlight the persistence of two foundational ideas related to sustainability—the notion of ecological limits, and the idea of sustained resource use over time—and note some of the places where the two were rhetorically and practically joined over the past two hundred years. When they were joined, I will argue, it was through religious or spiritually-grounded rhetoric or actions, and the interaction of these variables worked together to coalesce into the fuzzy sets of values I characterize as the religious dimension of sustainability.

**Early Uses of Cognates for Sustainability**

The word *sustainable* appeared in Middle English (in the late 1200s according to the American Heritage Dictionary) as an adjective that modified a verb or noun, and indicated an ongoing or persistent action or entity.<sup>56</sup> The term *sustainability* was used to refer to wise human

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<sup>56</sup> Accessed on Dictionary.com, 15 September 2008.

use and preservation of natural resources at least as early as 1849, when a German scientist named Faustmann described his attempts to discern what forest rotation would produce the largest yields for the future (Berkes, Folke and Colding 1998: 347). Several scholars attribute the contemporary use of sustainability to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCED) held in Stockholm, Sweden in 1972.<sup>57</sup> This makes some sense, since this was the first emergence of a concern for *global* sustainability. But there are much deeper roots to the notions of ecological scarcity and limits, the idea of sustainable use of natural resources over time, and the religious and spiritual attachments to the natural world that supported the emergence of environmental concern in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In many cases, religious and spiritual concepts may have provided the fertile habitat where the other two concerns could be fruitfully grafted together. Many of the core values and goals that are attributed to sustainability today were present, albeit in slightly different manifestations, two hundred years ago.<sup>58</sup>

Even scholars who push the genesis of the term back deeper into the past do not connect it to the present use of the term in any convincing way.<sup>59</sup> Andres Edwards, to his credit, traces

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<sup>57</sup> Jennifer Sumner suggests that, according to the Oxford Dictionary, the term originally derived from Thomas Sowell's 1972 book *Say's Law* (Sumner 2005, viii, 179).

<sup>58</sup> Donald Worster declares that sustainable development "has been around for at least two centuries; it is a product of the European Enlightenment...and reflects uncritically the modern faith in human intelligence's ability to manage nature. All that is new in the Brundtland Report and the other recent documents is that they have extended the idea *to the entire globe*" (Worster 1993: 146, italics his).

<sup>59</sup> Susan Baker's work *Sustainable Development* suggests that the term sustainability can be traced back to Malthus, Jevons, and others in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century who first noted, and publicly worried about resource scarcity (Baker 2006: 18). Paul Hawken argued that the environmental movement was spurred by the industrial revolution in England (Hawken 2007 : 6). Hawken goes on to suggest that the three primary tributaries for the contemporary sustainability movement are environmental activism, social justice, and indigenous cultures' resistance to globalization (12). Baker does little to flesh out her claim, and immediately skips ahead two centuries to find the idea of scarcity re-emerging into public consciousness in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hawken pinpoints the first stirrings of environmentalism in reactions to the industrial revolution, but does little to connect early resistance to industrialization to the Transcendentalist movement in the United States, where he begins his treatment of environmental consciousness. In both cases, I believe, there may be more to this story.

the impetus for sustainability back to the Transcendentalists (such as Emerson and Thoreau), John Muir and the concept of wilderness (Edwards 2005:12), and the emergence of “an awareness of the profound spiritual links between human beings and the natural world” (14-15). In my estimation Edwards is correct in these claims, and his observation of the “spiritual links” with the non-human world is astute. But other forces that helped to manufacture the contemporary understandings of global sustainability endorsed in the negotiations at Stockholm are underappreciated.

### **Ecological Limits and the Ethics of Scarcity**

Ideas regarding the limits of human habitats and attempts to live within them reach back at least to ancient Greek philosophers (Glacken 1967; see also T. R. Peterson 1997: 7). Varro was perhaps the first to note in print that sheep could easily decimate a landscape if not properly grazed (Glacken 1967: 143), a recognition later taken up by John Muir as he watched portions of his beloved Sierra Nevada range denuded by later generations of sheep (prompting Muir to brand them with the moniker “hoofed locusts”).<sup>60</sup> Cultural narratives related to ecological limits persist from early Western civilization to the roots of environmental movements catalyzed by the activism of Muir and others in the late 1800s.

If environmental movements are, as Hawken (2007) claims, one of the primary roots of contemporary sustainability discourse, and if Muir and his ken are at the root of environmental movements, then the political interests and social concerns that drive the contemporary sustainability movement certainly have ancestors in deeper historical streams. As historian Roderick Nash pointed out, nature appreciation, at least in the form that came to be identified

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<sup>60</sup> Glacken suggested that Varro had an “awareness of the power of [sheep] (an extension of human activity because it is under man’s control) as a destroyer of the vegetation of the farm or the mountain wilderness” (Glacken 1967: 143).

with environmental movements, began in the cities, prompted largely by an ethics of scarcity which began to seep into European consciousness in the early to mid 1700s as natural resources were overexploited (Nash 2001). During this period ecological limits took on a normative dimension, promoting a shift in human societal norms and helping to spawn the emergence of the intellectual movement Romanticism.

One of the most influential Romantic thinkers, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) promoted what he called primitivism, a return to dependence on the natural world, while glorifying the native peoples and wild places of the North American continent as exemplars of a “better” way to live.<sup>61</sup> Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), whose father was an acquaintance of Rousseau’s, was likewise impressed by the increasing industrialization of Europe, and at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was perhaps the first to connect the idea of ecological limits to population. It was around the same time that Ned Ludd (now a famous anti-technology folk hero) allegedly sabotaged some of the factory machinery that had put him out of work.<sup>62</sup> The wheels of industry were turning faster with each passing year and Ludd and other factory workers were imagined as martyrs (of sorts) of a bygone era when *human* labor (rather than machines) had driven the expansion of markets. Malthus, aware of this growing mechanization suggested that as industry progressed it would increase human productivity and the subsistence base, triggering a concomitant increase in population. Population increases would eventually result in human

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<sup>61</sup> Nash argued that “‘Romanticism’ resists definition, but in general it implies an enthusiasm for the strange, remote, solitary, and mysterious. Consequently in regard to nature Romantics preferred the wild” (2001: 47).

<sup>62</sup> Legend has it that Ludd threw a shoe into the mechanized loom, destroying it. The shoes were called *sabots*, and the word sabotage derives from this episode. Bron Taylor pointed out to me that most likely, Ludd never intended his action to be an “anti-technology” direct action, and that this was probably a later addition to the tale. But the story of Ludd’s resistance was popular within some environmental subcultures, particularly some of the more radical ones.

encounters with the ecological limits, leading ultimately in at least some areas to increased competition for resources.

Environmental limits quite literally helped to determine the shape of society as recognition of limits grew more widespread. Early European resource management was not simply a tool for utilizing natural resources; it also contributed to the management of citizen populations. For European foresters, science could provide a systematic method for ensuring that social chaos did not ensue from the overexploitation of the land, providing for the persistence of the social order (Worster 1993: 144-145). Expertise in managing forests was believed to be related to the ordering of society in general. One of the first North American foresters, Gifford Pichot, would draw the same connections between resource management and the social order in the United States.

If the ethics of scarcity motivated the first efforts at conservation on the Continent, then the subsequent celebration of wild places catalyzed the emergence of the “church of the wilderness” in the young United States.<sup>63</sup> Nash argued that “if, as many suspected, wilderness was the medium through which God spoke most clearly, then America had a distinct moral advantage over Europe, where centuries of civilization had deposited a layer of artificiality over His works” (Nash 2001: 69).

The Transcendental philosophers (most notably Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau) are well-known for taking their inspiration from nature, and they in turn inspired

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<sup>63</sup> I take the phrase “wilderness church” from environmental historian William Cronon’s admission, in response to numerous critics of his well-known essay “The Trouble with Wilderness,” that wild places were where he “worshipped.” (1996a; for the original essay see Cronon 1996b). In a similar vein, in his book *Making Nature Sacred* (2004) John Gatta traces nature writing (from the late 1600s into the 20<sup>th</sup> century) in the United States and its consecration of the idea that nature is a *locus dei*.

generations of people to act on behalf of their habitats.<sup>64</sup> Nash noted that John Muir was heavily influenced by the Transcendentalists, particularly Emerson and Thoreau: “For John Muir Transcendentalism was always the essential philosophy for interpreting the value of wilderness” (Nash 2001: 125).<sup>65</sup> It was no coincidence that Muir’s founding of the Sierra Club in 1892, the first wilderness preservation organization in the United States, fell so near the announcement by well-known historian Frederick Jackson Turner that the frontier—so instrumental in the formulation of U.S. nationalism and American moral imagination—had officially “closed” (Turner 1956 [1893]). Thus, the ethics of scarcity was activated in the United States as well as Europe. When ecological limits were reached or breached, first in Europe and later in North America, preservation and conservation grew into important causes.

Often Muir and his Transcendentalist contemporaries (who are often termed “preservationists”) are contrasted with the primarily utilitarian rhetoric of Gifford Pinchot and Theodore Roosevelt (typically called “conservationists” in the literature). Often these “preservationists” have been portrayed as unhelpful because they depend upon moralizing language and emotion-based arguments for keeping certain portions of nature free from human interference. Those on the other side of the debate, however, are no less evangelical in their insistence that utility maximization is a moral good. Bryan Norton argued that both Muir and Pinchot were ideologues because they carried their “preexperiential commitments” with them into the public sphere (Norton 2005: ix). In part Norton is correct—even in its more

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<sup>64</sup> Emerson and Thoreau both also retained an ambivalence about wild nature. Efforts at mediating between wild and cultivated worlds were in a significant sense driven by spiritual metaphors which focused on achievement of human potential, and advocated a certain humility regarding the natural limits that bounded humans’ attempts to understand, and master the natural world (Gatta 2004; Sears 1989).

<sup>65</sup> Gatta argued that Muir’s thought should not be reduced to Transcendentalism, that it differed in important ways from the prototypical Transcendentalist authors (2004: 148-157, esp. 151). But the influence is clear. Clearly borrowing Thoreau’s dictum on preserving the wildness in nature, Muir wrote that “in God’s wildness lies the hope of the world—the great fresh, unblighted, unredeemed wilderness” (Nash 128). From Muir (*My First Summer* p. 250).

management-oriented manifestations, arguments that resources should be sustainably managed were no less dependent on religious and spiritual rhetoric and metaphor than more poetic pronouncements of nature's value.<sup>66</sup>

### **The Gospel of Conservation: The Idea of Sustainable Resource Use Over Time**

The term sustainability was used in European forest management in the mid 1800s, but at that time North America had no schools dedicated to studying forest use and management, no foresters, and no forestry plan. Gifford Pinchot, the son of well-to-do and politically savvy family studied forestry in France and imported the idea of sustainable resource use over time to the United States. Thus, the use of the sustainable resource management in contemporary parlance reaches back before the first inklings of resource management programs in the United States, and it is this usage, a human-centered one that focused on maximizing production and linking it to national security and citizen management, eventually translated into a North American context, which would dominate the use of the term into the present. Gifford Pinchot was largely responsible for both the establishment of the U.S. Forest Service and the emergence of political progressivism, and was thus a pivotal figure in the formulation of the domestic resource management and economic policies aimed at sustainable resource management and national development (and eventually, *sustainable development*).

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<sup>66</sup> I agree with much of Norton's analysis, and his process-oriented, schematic definition of sustainability has been a powerful influence on my own understanding of sustainability. But as will become clearer, I remain unconvinced that the distinctions he draws between the ideas of Muir, Pinchot, and Leopold are entirely accurate. I suspect that they were all, to some extent, "pragmatists" (in the way he is using the term), using the scientific knowledge of the day to make educated guesses about how humans interact with ecosystems, nonetheless relying on spiritualized language and rhetoric when circumstances seemed especially dire. For example, Pinchot's most dramatic spiritual language comes in his vociferous attacks on the administration officials who removed him from his post (Pinchot 1947, also see the introduction to Pinchot 1910). Muir's use of theological references certainly intensified as he watched the fight for Hetch Hetchy slip between his fingers (see Holmes 2005: 1126-1127). While Norton likes to think that Leopold had moved away from utilizing such arguments, many (including his daughter) perceive in his work ethical lessons drawn from a spiritual attachment to the ecosystems with which he interacted (Meine 2005).

In his book *Breaking New Ground* Pinchot stated that the goal of forestry was “to make the forest produce the largest possible amount of whatever crop or service will be the most useful, and keep on producing it for generation after generation of men and trees” (Pinchot 1947: 32). Pinchot’s utilitarianism included as central variables future generations of humans and trees in its calculus. Interestingly, protection of the public good from corporate raiders is at the root of Pinchot’s progressive social philosophy (Pinchot 1910: 48) bolstered by his belief that building social equity was a moral duty.<sup>67</sup> In his last work, Pinchot described conservation as centering on three main goals: 1) to wisely use, protect, preserve and renew natural resources; 2) to control the use of natural resources for the common good, and to ensure their equal distribution; and 3) “to see to it that the rights of the people to govern themselves shall not be controlled by great monopolies through their power over natural resources” (Pinchot 1947: 596). “Pinchotism,”<sup>68</sup> as his philosophy has been called, remains highly influential (if implicit) in the United States’ resource management philosophy, and was instrumental in the emergence of the sustainability movement.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Pinchot’s utilitarian ideas were the first instance of a nationally-mandated program of sustainable yield for a natural resource—resources which were, for Pinchot, the basic wealth of the nation (Penick 1968).

<sup>68</sup> This is in fact a pejorative term devised by critics in the Western US who disliked federal agencies meddling in local land use matters. Their critique according to one Pinchot biographer stemmed from a generic “pioneer individualism, the desire to exploit the country’s resources unhampered by government restriction” (Pinkett 1970: 75-80).

<sup>69</sup> The impact of Pinchot’s perspective on national resource management regimes should not be underestimated. When Theodore Roosevelt ascended to the White House in 1901, his first address to Congress outlined the creation of a Bureau of Reclamation to help develop the arid lands of the U.S., and more importantly for Pinchot (the son of an old family friend), the Bureau of Forestry, which was to have jurisdiction over all public forests (McGreary 1960: 54; Pinchot 1947: 189-191). As Roosevelt’s premier resource manager, Pinchot wrote a great number of Roosevelt’s speeches regarding resource management, and often the President sent Pinchot to negotiate on his behalf with the full power of the Presidential office. As a member of his “tennis cabinet,” Pinchot weighed in on every facet of federal resource management and policy (Penick 1968: 5). According to Pinchot’s estimates, during Roosevelt’s presidency, between 1903 and 1909, Forest Reserves increased from 62,354,965 acres to 194,505,325 acres, more than three fold (Pinchot 1947: 254).

To no small degree Pinchot's religious beliefs informed his political ideals and his understanding of how forests should be managed. The spiritual foundations of Pinchot's politics were revealed most clearly in his book *The Fight for Conservation* (1910).<sup>70</sup> The relationship between Pinchot's conservation, politics, and spirituality is exposed in Pinchot's three primary presuppositions. First it is important to realize that Pinchot viewed the conservation of natural resources as the foundation of long-term national success (Pinchot 1910: 4).<sup>71</sup> Second, for Pinchot, achieving the first goal of conservation, national security, is somewhat dependent on a prior choice between "unclean money or free men" as the ultimate object of the political system (Pinchot 1910: 92).<sup>72</sup> Third, these moral duties to protect resources for future generations and for the common good stem from a larger commitment to foster the actualization of Christian values in the world. Pinchot argued that "among the first duties of every man is to help in bringing the Kingdom of God on earth," and "public spirit is patriotism in action; it is the application of Christianity to the commonwealth....[it] is the one great antidote to the ills of the Nation" (Pinchot 1910: 95-96).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> As the introduction to the book stated, "Pinchot saw himself on the side of the angels, leading the forces of righteousness against dark, evil, conspiratorial influences. Reflected in what Theodore Roosevelt termed the doctrine of stewardship, Pinchot's neo-Calvinism was Puritanism placed in early-twentieth-century dress" (Pinchot 1910: xviii). Pinchot was heavily influenced by the social gospel movement, which attempted to apply Christian principles to solve social crises created by the industrial revolution (Naylor 2005: 1281).

<sup>71</sup> Making the nation into a prosperous and permanent (or sustainable) home for future generations was the focus of Pinchot's social philosophy, and in its elucidation, Pinchot drew on imagery from the Constitution and the founding fathers' vision of the agrarian, Jeffersonian ideal (Pinchot 1910: 21-39). He stated "we have a duty resting upon us...to a reasonable use of natural resources during our lifetime...for in the last analysis this question of conservation is the question of national preservation and national efficiency" (Pinchot 1910: 77-78).

<sup>72</sup> For Pinchot conservation was a particularly democratic movement, and "regard[ed] the absorption of [natural] resources by the special interests, unless their operations are under effective public control, as a moral wrong" (Pinchot 1910: 81).

<sup>73</sup> For Pinchot, it was each person's moral duty to manifest Christian ideals in the society for equitable distribution of resources and the sustainability of the nation, since "a man in public life can no more serve both the special interests and the people than he can serve God and Mammon" (Pinchot 1910: 115). Pinchot believed that it was greed that drove resource overexploitation, and that those who were guilty of such greediness were working against the common good. As historian Donald Worster framed the greed that drove resource exhaustion, "Jesus, for

Pinchot's three pillars of sustainable resource use, a long-term perspective, protection of the poor and weak from the predation of moneyed interests, and the invective to serve a higher moral calling, are all instrumental in contemporary discussions of sustainability. As Tarla Rai Peterson noted, "sustainable development was addressed by Gifford Pinchot ....[who] advocated development of resources and prevention of waste for the benefit of the largest possible number of people" (Peterson 1997); see also Pinchot 1910: 42-50). The humanism reflected in later definitions of sustainability, for example in the Bruntland Commission Report (discussed below), is reminiscent of Pinchot's invocation of 1) a global ethic designed to protect the poor by promoting social equity, 2) the maintenance of economic productivity to preserve national sovereignty and security, and 3) the long-term conservation of environmental products and services.

### **Some Early Foci of Global Sustainability and its Religious Dimensions**

These two perspectives, the recognition of the importance of ecological limits, and the more managerial model focused on sustainable use of resources over time, contributed significantly to the emergence of environmental and social movements which eventually manifested in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in a variety of movements loosely related to sustainability. Both leaned heavily on religious and spiritual rhetoric and metaphor to support their positions. Unfortunately, important figureheads such as John Muir and Gifford Pinchot are often characterized as being motivated by opposite aims, which tends to accentuate artificial dichotomies in the emergence of environmental consciousness. Muir and his "preservationists" are often described as advocating that wilderness can only be considered truly wild when it is

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instance, had declared that it was harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle. Apparently, in America, however, our camels were smaller and our needles larger" (1993: 14).

devoid of humans or the footprint of human activity. Pinchot and his “conservationists,” on the other hand, are typically portrayed as consequentialist utility maximizers, willing to use (and possibly even use up) natural resources so long as the benefits accrue primarily to human users. Although I used these two personages here as exemplars of different perspectives (awareness of ecological scarcity and limits, and the belief that resources should be conserved for future generations), these perspectives are in fact complimentary in contemporary sustainability discourse, not in opposition. Moreover, both of these figureheads deployed religious or spiritual language in direct correlation to the severity of the political fights at stake (Muir, for example, during the fight to prevent the construction of Hetch Hetchy dam [Nash 2001: 167]).<sup>74</sup> Most importantly for my purposes here, both of these streams of argument are crucial to the ideas behind and practice of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century sustainability.

### **Globalizing the Sustainability and Development Discourse**

The beginnings of what geographer Aidan Davison (2001) called the “first wave” of environmentalism emerged here at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: from the emergence of scarcity and environmental concern in Europe, the emergence of Romanticism, the myth of the frontier, the elaboration (in art, music, and national parks) of a new U.S. nationalism in the form of wilderness, the formation of the Sierra Club by John Muir (1892), the creation of the Audubon Society (1905), and finally the emergence of a scarcity ethic in the United States around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the first thirty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, farming technologies improved increasing food yield per acre and decreasing the number of workers required to produce those yields.

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<sup>74</sup> I am not suggesting that these two really should have “gotten along,” or that they had congruent ideas about how to relate to or manage the natural world. What I am suggesting is that despite their significant disagreements, both drew on religious metaphor, language, and imagery to buttress their positions in the public sphere. This provides a good illustration of my point that sustainability movements are deeply infused with this religious dimension, and it further highlights that this is by no means a recent development.

During World War I, the government demanded that increased wheat yields would win the war, boosting further production increases (Worster 1977: 60-61).

Immediately following World War I ideas about ecological limits and sustainable use of natural resources persisted in the background. But it was during this politically and socially tumultuous era that the “development” tributary of what later became sustainable development exploded onto the international scene. Worries over basic sustenance and security preoccupied the industrialized world because it was believed that shortfalls in these areas in less or unindustrialized places had manifested in very costly military and reconstructive expenditures.

Gilbert Rist argued that by deploying the idea of *development*, “by defining itself as the precursor of a history common to all, the West could treat colonization as a generous undertaking to ‘help’ more or less ‘backward’ societies along the road to civilization” (Rist 1997: 43).<sup>75</sup>

With the full inertia of the aftermath of the First World War behind it, development flourished on the newly international world stage as a new “grand narrative” (Rist: 39). Rist’s opinion of the character of this grand development narrative is evident in the subtitle to his book, *From Western Origins to Global Faith*. For Rist, the concept of development operates as a religious narrative, providing a vision for where the global community is headed, and a normative framework for getting there.

The League of Nations was created at the end of World War I, just days before the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (which officially ended aggression on 28 June 1919) (Rist: 59). The founding document of the League of Nations, using a largely economic calculus, reinforced the idea that there were “stages of development” which provided a motivation for those in the industrialized world to facilitate the reconstruction of conquered areas and provide

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<sup>75</sup> Rist traces the idea of development, of somehow bettering the human condition, back to Ancient Greece (1997: 25-31) and the elucidation of the idea that there is some directionality and continuity in the process of history (27).

improved standards of living for the “less developed” countries.<sup>76</sup> Just as Christopher Columbus’s landing in the New World began the conquest of the Americas in the name of Christianization, “colonization... now present[ed] itself, thorough the League of Nations, as a ‘sacred trust of civilization.’ This was not just an innocent form of words, for it placed the final objective [of development] in the realm of religion and the sacred” (Rist 1997: 68, Rist is quoting the League’s founding document). This new grand narrative, the “religion” of development, highlights the all-encompassing vision that the term (and its cognate sustainable development) still offer.<sup>77</sup>

By the 1930s it had become clear that massive increases in productive capacity in North America had taken their toll on the soils. This soil crisis, coupled with the economic hangover from the market crash in 1929, prompted a turn to science in a rush to discern the causes and mitigate the impacts of the recent environmental crises.<sup>78</sup> The economic downturn of the 1920s and 1930s caused by intensive tilling and farming technologies resulted in unpleasant encounters with ecological limits, and brought the idea of sustainable use into public consciousness once again—this time related (if weakly at first) with notions of development that had incubated in the global North, arguably since colonial times.

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<sup>76</sup> The justification for what Rist characterizes as “disguised annexations” was clothed in humanitarian and religious language that suggested that the victors held the future of civilization in their hands (1997: 62).

<sup>77</sup> Rist’s assessment of the religious status of development is negative, operating as he presumably imagines other institutionalized religions do, manufacturing consent, repressing dissent, and marginalizing minority voices.

<sup>78</sup> As Worster put it, in “the environmental crisis of the dirty thirties...the new profession of ecologists found themselves for the first time in service as land-use advisers to an entire nation. That episode laid the groundwork for a more scientifically fueled conservation movement in America” (1977: 253). Worster makes clear that this new science of ecology, by the 1930s, had already had an increasingly significant impact on the policy process as a direct result of a perceived environmental crisis (1977: 233).

World War II brought pervasive social and economic changes across Europe and North America.<sup>79</sup> The rhetoric of reducing waste, re-using materials, and recycling products, one of the more common slogans of some contemporary sustainability advocates (“reduce, reuse, recycle”), has a long history. My grandparents, who had moved from the “farm country” to the city early in their married lives remembered how to plant again when the government began its WWII public relations campaign in support of home-grown “victory gardens.” These positive affirmations of voluntary simplification of the middle American lifestyle played a significant role in helping to achieve the productive capacity required to win the war.

However, there were also more apocalyptic reminders from the federal government that any failure to act according to the new ethic of voluntary simplicity amounted to complicity with the enemy (see Figure 4-1 and 4-2). If you weren’t carpooling, one advertisement said, it was the same as giving Hitler a lift (see Figure 4-3). Perhaps ironically, many contemporary environmental activists suggest something similar—that mindless consumption (especially of oil-based products or petroleum) is a threat to national security, an aid to the enemies of our culture in particular, and hastens our demise as a species.<sup>80</sup>

Following the Second World War, the wartime productive capacity of the United States and Western Europe required additional outlets. The Marshall Plan (1947) was created to help a struggling Europe regain its economic and political footing and to simultaneously provide additional markets for American goods as production shifted from war machines to consumer

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<sup>79</sup> Worster (1977) may be correct in tracing the first inklings of truly nation-wide concern for ecological limits and the importance of sustainable use of resources to the aftermath of the Depression and Dust Bowl. During World War II sustainable use and re-use and rationing of materials helped to continue this significant shift in consumption patterns.

<sup>80</sup> This sentiment is not only proffered by environmentalists. L. Hunter Lovins, a well-known entrepreneur and sustainability consultant argues that current energy policies in the United States, and within development schemes abroad, compromise national security by perpetuating dependence on centralized energy production typically associated with fossil fuels (see [www.natcapsolutions.org/resources.htm#ART](http://www.natcapsolutions.org/resources.htm#ART), especially 1982; 2002; accessed 28 October 2008).

goods (Rist 1997: 69). In contrast to the war years' demand for reducing material consumption, in the late 1940s and early 1950s the United States' prosperity was tied to the willingness of the individual to amass an increasing volume of consumer goods. Consuming—putting money back into the economy—had become a patriotic act. Interestingly then, while the war era helped to provide some of the first experiments with nation-wide voluntary simplicity, wartime growth in industrial output caused a resultant backlash of increased consumerism. This was a watershed moment that significantly contributed to growing sustainability movements. As the first resource management regimes were generated in Europe and the United States by an emerging ethic of scarcity, “environmentalism” bubbled up in both places as a reaction to the increased exploitation of natural resources, and spread due to the globalization of politics in the wake of the two World Wars. The globalization of sustainability and development discourse included concerns for both ecological limits and increased resource efficiency. Moreover, both of these important foundations of sustainability were tethered to a nationalist pride that had at the heart of its ethos certain sets of principles, prescriptions, and observations that can (and have been) analyzed as a civil (or national) religion (Bellah 1970: 168-189). During and following World War II, this civil religion was especially potent, and an important precursor to sustainability in general and sustainable development in particular.

President Harry Truman's 1949 inauguration address where he outlined his Four Point Plan arguably officially “internationalized” the idea of development (and eventually, its offspring, sustainable development) (Jolly et al., 2004: 50; Rist 1997: 70-72).<sup>81</sup> Development was given a human face, and its spread was aided by the “structural homology with religious

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<sup>81</sup> The four-point plan was a platform for foreign policy. It was “Point Four” which related to development. The first three “points” of the plan included the perpetuation of the young United Nations, the formulation of the Marshall Plan, and the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

discourse” (Rist 1997: 77). Rist argued that “the new belief in ‘development’ had its credibility further strengthened by a naturalist metaphor so long part of the Western collective consciousness” (77).<sup>82</sup> The emerging ideas of development and environmentalism were new ways to frame concern regarding ecological limits and wise use of resources over time. Contemporary sustainability discourse preserved both and added the ingredients of emerging global political and economic bodies.

### **Conclusions: From Religious Resistance to Global Faith**

Licking their wounds from battles with countries ruled by fascists and emperors, many of the younger generations in Northern Europe and the United States were uneasy about both the promise of technological progress and sources of authority (whether political or economic). This youthful unease, typically associated with the countercultural discontent that bubbled up in the 1950s and came to a head during the 1960s included members of “peace, civil rights, feminist, New Left, and neo-Marxist movements” (Davison 2000: xii). Armin Geertz argued that these movements were facets of a “new primitivism”<sup>83</sup> which grew in part from “the hippie movement” and were based on experience, anti-rationalism, and anti-intellectualism (2004: 53).<sup>84</sup> Further, Geertz argued that these movements were directly influenced by the emergence of a closely related tributary of primitivism that grew out of the University of Chicago’s History of Religions research agenda, one spearheaded by Mircea Eliade. Geertz argued that Eliade’s *Shamanism*, for example (first published in French in 1951), influenced the theosophy

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<sup>82</sup> Truman mandated that “we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas....The old imperialism—exploitation for foreign profit—has no place in our plans....Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace” (quoted in Davison 2000: 31).

<sup>83</sup> The “older” primitivism was championed by the likes of Rousseau and his Romantic era supporters.

<sup>84</sup> While Geertz uses the term anti-rational to describe these countercultural movements, that they are grounded in the importance of experience does not necessarily imply that are always anti-rational, or anti-intellectual. This may be an oversimplification of what was certainly a diverse movement.

movement, the author Jack Kerouac and one of Kerouac's real-life protagonists Gary Snyder, and helped to prompt the turn to the East and to indigenous traditions as sources of spiritual growth (A. Geertz 2004: 55).<sup>85</sup> As these countercultural movements began to grow more aware of development and its impacts on the habitats around them, development was given a boost on an international scale when U.S. President John Kennedy proposed to the UN General Assembly (25 September 1961) that they initiate a "Decade of Development" which focused on promoting economic growth (Jolly et al., 2004: 85).<sup>86</sup>

The countercultural currents in Europe and especially in the United States provided sustainability movements with ties to peace and labor movements, and advertised the idea that development and globalization were not always universal "goods." Related scholarly currents, such as the Chicago school alluded to above, also exposed sustainability movements to other cultures and lifeways. Meanwhile, what Rist called the "global faith" of development was increasingly touted by governments and multi-national groups such as the United Nations as the means to alleviate poverty and increase security in a sustainable manner (Rist 1997). Thus, the roots of sustainability and sustainable development, it should be clear, reach into both subcultures of resistance as well as institutional, and international political and economic structures. While the spiritual dimensions of the reactions of civil society to sustainable development have been well documented (Posey and Balick 2006; Sumner 2005; Carr 2004; Taylor 1995; Warren et al. 1995; Ghai and Vivian 1992; Wright 1988; Wright forthcoming), less attention has been paid to the spiritual dimensions of international political discourse (though Chapman, Petersen and Smith-Moran 2000 is a notable exception, and Taylor 2009 has recently

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<sup>85</sup> Snyder was the inspiration for Japhy Ryder, the main character of Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1958).

<sup>86</sup> Kennedy called for a 5% increase in aggregate income per year in the "underdeveloped" countries.

begun to fill the gap). Chapter 5 focuses on how civil society, multi-national political groups, and religious cultural production intersect and strengthen the religious dimension of sustainability.

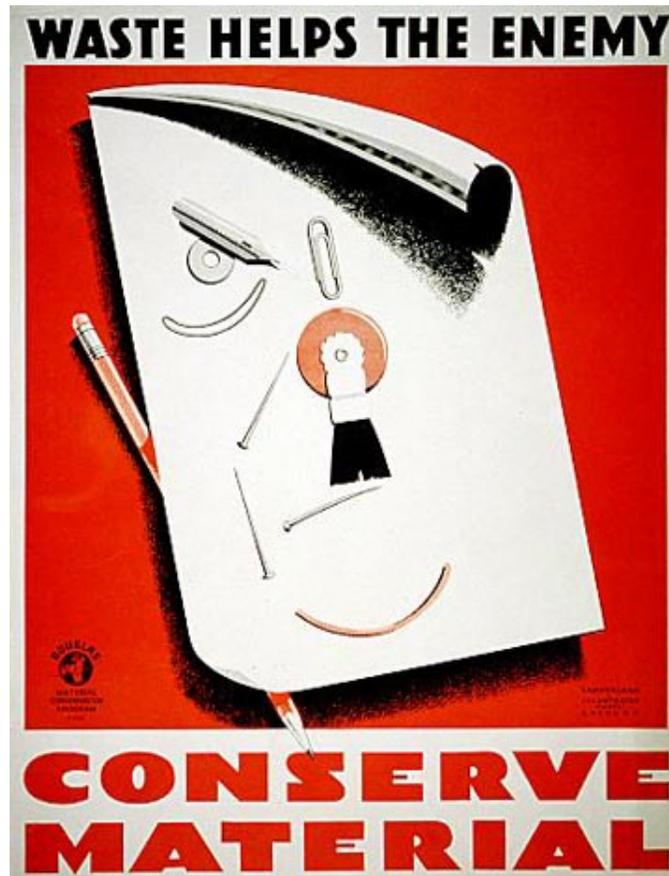


Figure 4-1. Conserve Material

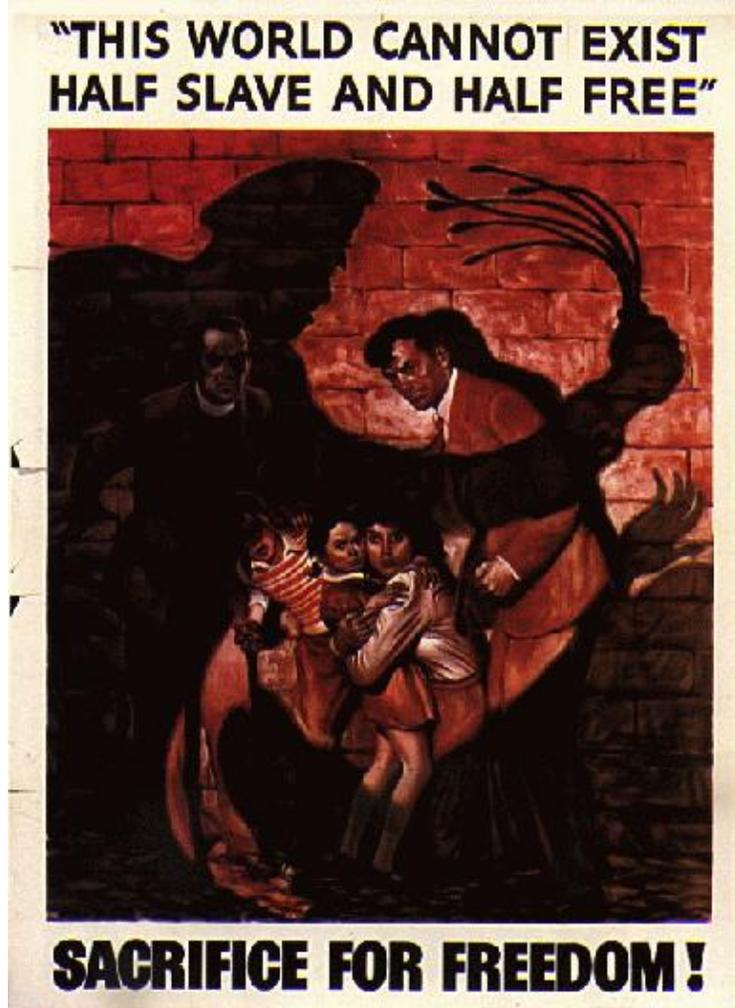


Figure 4-2. Sacrifice for Freedom



Figure 4-3. Car-Sharing

CHAPTER 5  
THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF SUSTAINABILITY AT THE NEXUS OF CIVIL  
SOCIETY AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

**Introduction**

Over the past two decades, “environmentalism” (Dunlap 2004; Palmer and Finlay 2003; Dudley, Higgins-Zogib, and Mansourian 2005), “development” (Rist 1997), capitalism (Loy 2000: 15-28; Harvey 2005), and social and ecological resistance to capitalism (Sumner 2005; Taylor 1995) have all been described as religions or at least as having significant religious dimensions. In many cases sustainability, which in various ways manifests all these other phenomena that could be considered religious, also functions as a religious narrative whose roots lie in certain readings of the natural sciences, the social sciences, as well as existing religious and spiritual practices and traditions.<sup>87</sup>

Religious groups and leaders, as well as spiritual language and metaphor were important to sustainability from at least the beginnings of the counter-cultural movements discussed at the close of Chapter 4. They contributed to both faith-based elucidations of ecological consciousness and a more generic, humanistic civil religion. All three of these types of religious production—the nature-as-sacred religion that resonates within many subcultures of resistance, ecological pronouncements from institutionalized religious traditions, and generic, humanistic civil religion—were present within international political venues attended by civil society actors and international governance units such as the UN and World Bank . This chapter focuses on the contributions of institutional religions, political institutions and religions of resistance to the religious dimension of sustainability at major benchmark conferences and events, and concludes

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<sup>87</sup> By this I mean that the language used to describe what sustainability *is* typically derives from one of these three sources. This chapter focuses on the latter, the contributions to sustainability from existing religious traditions and practices. Chapter 6 focuses on the contributions of natural and social scientists to the religious dimension of sustainability.

by highlighting some contemporary developments at the nexus of civil society and international politics.

Interestingly, both religious and secular groups utilize the religious dimension of sustainability (in the form of spiritualized language, religious metaphor, or discourses of awe and reverence) for their own, often different ends. That may mean that religious discourse can sometimes act as the tie that binds these varied constituencies (environmentalists, development advocates, conservationists, capitalists, governments and oppositional subcultures) together in the search for sustainability.<sup>88</sup> To illuminate how these varied stakeholders contribute to the religious dimension of sustainability, it will be helpful to provide more detail about how narratively-embedded cognitive tools are transmitted through sustainability networks. With this web of relationships (between agents, ideas practices) in view, it should become clear that the political processes that some scholars (i.e., Norton 2005; Light 2002; Light and de-Shalit 2003) have pointed to as the essential elements of sustainability may require inputs from this spiritual dimension of sustainability for the formulation of sustainable public policy.

### **Global Attentiveness to Limits, the Stockholm Conference, and Other Indicators of Possible Doom**

In the mid-1960s the National Council of Churches (NCC) convened the Faith-Man-Nature Study Group, focused on transforming Christian attitudes toward nature. In 1966 the World Council of Churches (WCC) launched a five-year study program devoted to the impacts of technology on society, including components that attended to environmental effects. The resulting report “accepted the thesis of nature’s limits and called for a society that is both just

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<sup>88</sup> The etymology of “religion” is typically traced to the Latin root *leig* (“to bind”), or *religare* (“to reconnect”). See Dubuisson (2003: 22-39), Saler (1999: 64-69), Thomas (2005: 21-26) and Taylor (2007: 9-14) for further discussion. Although it seems that the inclusion of this religious dimension is important for democratic politics, its inclusion does not mean that negotiations will always be positive or fruitful. Indeed, religion may also *prevent* consensus and action at times, but at least in such cases the fundamental value sets that lead to the failure of consensus are explicit, rather than implicit.

and sustainable” (Chapman, Peterson, and Smith-Moran 2000: 12).<sup>89</sup> Interestingly then, these ecumenical groups were one of the first to use the term sustainable as a shorthand reference for a socially equitable and ecologically responsible global community. In 1967 Pope Paul VI declared his commitment to equitable development, stating that “the new name for peace [is] development” (quoted in Therien 2005: 29). The United Nations first addressed environmental issues directly when in 1968 when the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) created [resolution 1346 \(XLV\)](#), which recommended that the General Assembly consider convening a United Nations conference dedicated to addressing a “crisis of world wide proportions...the crisis of the human environment” (Jolly et al. 2004: 125).<sup>90</sup>

This tone of crisis set the stage for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (1972), which, in response to the ECOSOC resolution, for the first time brought concerns about sustainability to the *global* community by suggesting that unsustainability was directly correlated with poverty in the developing world.<sup>91</sup> Attendees envisioned development as the only salve for the poverty that created human vulnerability to environmental fluctuations and encouraged over-exploitation of local resource bases. For example, Principle Eight, endorsed by the commission, stated that “Economic and social development is essential for ensuring a favorable living and working environment for man [*sic*] and for creating conditions on earth that are necessary for the improvement of the quality of

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<sup>89</sup> The report was officially accepted by the WCC in Bucharest in 1974.

<sup>90</sup> The resolution passed on 30 July 1968, see <http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/specenv.htm>, accessed 30 January 2009. Jolly et al. are quoting the speech from the Secretary-General U Thant (UN 1969: 4). Thant, a native of Myanmar, succeeded Dag Hammarskjöld in 1961 to become the third UN Secretary-General (see <http://www.un.org/Overview/SG/sg3bio.html> for a biography, accessed 30 January 2009).

<sup>91</sup> In essence the document argued that poverty was the *causal element* in most of the world’s ills, including resource shortages, violent conflict and ecological degradation.

life.”<sup>92</sup> Most of the world’s problems, the report concluded, were due to “under-development.” Interestingly though, while human needs were ultimately paramount, the ecological matrix upon which they depend was offered as the context in which all good decisions about the shape of development must be made: “Man is both creature and moulder of his environment, which gives him physical sustenance and affords him the opportunity for intellectual, moral, social and spiritual growth.” Humans are referred to as “creatures,” a word whose origin is rooted in Middle English and which referred to something derived from an act of creation, which implies a common understanding that there is a “creator” behind the existence of humans and their ability to exact change on their habitats.<sup>93</sup>

The conclusions reached by those at the conference upheld the sovereignty of particular nations to exploit their resources in accordance with their own values. Importantly, even in this early manifestation of sustainability discourse, the unique needs of each nation were recognized: “it will be essential in all cases to consider the systems of values prevailing in each country, and the extent of the applicability of standards which are valid for the most advanced countries but which may be inappropriate and of unwarranted social cost for the developing countries.”<sup>94</sup> Although there was a tacit recognition that sustainability might not be a monolithic concept or solution set, participants recommend a “common outlook and...common principles” to guide the

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<sup>92</sup> The full text is available online at <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=97&ArticleID=1503&l=en> (accessed 13 September 2008). The quotes in this paragraph are from this online text unless otherwise noted.

<sup>93</sup> The dictionary (accessed 12 February 2009 at Dictionary.com, which is based on the 2006 Random House Dictionary) lists six definitions of creature, two of which are based on the creature’s ultimate dependence upon another being. These are relevant to the way in which the word was used here, marking an instance of an early international political venue where religious ideas were invoked.

<sup>94</sup> From [www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=97&ArticleID=1503&l=en](http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=97&ArticleID=1503&l=en), accessed 13 September 2008.

search for sustainability.<sup>95</sup> Perhaps the most important long-term outcome of the Stockholm meeting was the birth of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), headed by conference chairman Maurice Strong and based in Nairobi, Kenya, quite far from the power centers of the UN.

Elsewhere, the same year that the Stockholm Conference was convened, Donella Meadows and her collaborators at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) published their treatise *Limits to Growth* (1972), a report funded by the Club of Rome, a group of influential international scientists, business leaders, and public servants. The researchers used computer models to simulate the trends in population and consumption of food and non-renewable resources, leading them to the conclusion that if such trends continued, very real ecological limits would impose very real suffering on human populations within a hundred or so years (Dresner 2005: 25-26).<sup>96</sup> Though arguably somewhat apocalyptic in tone, it revitalized what had long been one of the principal facets of the long history of sustainability-related discourse: the idea of ecological limits.

Other assessments of potentially catastrophic encounters with ecological limits included Garret Hardin's influential essays "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968) and "Lifeboat Ethics" (1974). The former argued that resources managed as a commons would inevitably be overexploited.<sup>97</sup> Using the example of sheep grazers, Hardin reasoned that since each commons

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<sup>95</sup> This phrase was used in the opening paragraph of the Stockholm report.

<sup>96</sup> Dresner suggested that strong criticisms of *Limits to Growth* ultimately doomed it to irrelevancy (2005: 26). He likewise dismissed other books focused on limits, such as Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968) as alarmist. As I showed in the last chapter, ideas about ecological limits were common within sustainability discourse long before this, and in my judgment continue to be significant concepts.

<sup>97</sup> One strong criticism of Hardin's work is that it presumes a specific moral anthropology, a way of making ethical decisions based on strictly individualistic cost-benefit analysis. For some criticisms of his idea about commons management regimes related to sustainability see Buck 2004 and Sumner 2005, chapter five, especially pages 100-112.

user would have high personal incentive to protect their own flock but would share with all other users the cost of overexploitation, logic would lead all users to aim for maximum exploitation of the resource in the shortest time causing a collapse of the resource. Hardin later extended his metaphorical models to the international scale and argued that each sovereign state could be envisioned as a lifeboat with a finite number of resources (1974). Each boat could easily be “swamped” by allocating such resources too liberally or even uncritically “sharing” them with those in other “boats” (or nations).<sup>98</sup> In the end, Hardin’s political recommendations for the environmental crisis manifested in a political arrangement he called “mutual coercion mutually agreed upon” (Hardin 1968: 1247-1248). William Ophuls’ *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity* (Ophuls 1977) similarly suggested that only a coercive politics and an accompanying global scale “green religion” could prevent the deterioration of ecological resources that resulted from ineffective or absent incentives for conservation (for further discussion see Taylor 2009: 260).

Meadows et al., Hardin, and Ophuls have each had their share of harsh critics, both for the assumptions underlying their arguments, as well as their proposed solutions (i.e., coercive political schemes). Although such pronouncements of ecological overshoot are now based in the sciences related to population dynamics and carrying capacity (Catton 1980), they have strong parallels with Malthusian arguments (see Chapter 4 pp. 63-64). Far from disappearing from sustainability discourse as Dresner has suggested (2005: 26-27), they remain important.

Religious language may be (but is not always) evident in such literature, but such resource management measures are nearly always considered morally obligatory.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> To elaborate, providing food to other “boats” that do not themselves have any more food would overcome natural selection in a sense, keeping alive organisms that would not ordinarily survive without such aid. Eventually the population would exceed the carrying capacity of the habitat.

<sup>99</sup> Some of the protégés of these scholars, such as Hunter Lovins (heavily influenced by Meadows) publicly use metaphors and language with spiritual overtones or implications.

Gilbert Rist noted that “The birth of the ecological movement coincided with a period of gloom and creeping doubt in the industrial countries” (1997: 141). But these predictions of ecological limits and coercive political measures were not to have the last word. For the first time the idea that individual and family security (adequate sustenance, water, shelter and physical safety) were prerequisites for achieving sustainability was vetted in an international political venue.

### **Glimmers of Hope from the South: The Barbados Declarations and the NIEO**

The global South in particular continued to emphasize the *social* aspects of development. While the Stockholm gathering highlighted poverty as the primary scourge of peace and equity, it had also prescribed a somewhat invasive idea of growth, facilitated by external development bodies and governments, as its cure. Just prior, in 1971, the World Council of Churches (WCC) convened their “Program to Combat Racism” in Barbados. The attendees, primarily social scientists, were calling attention to what was being called the “Fourth World,” populations in already “underdeveloped” (Harry S. Truman’s term) nations who were disenfranchised not only by the prevailing international economic and political powers, but also by the governments of their own nations.<sup>100</sup> As the anthropologist Robin Wright put it, these social scientists were advocating

the notion that indigenous peoples throughout the world are united by their common situation as disenfranchised people, whose existence depends on a moral claim but who challenge the First World to examine its institutions, structures, and values, which have left indigenous peoples powerless and dependent (Wright 1988: 365-390).

In the early 1970s several nations in the developing world proposed a “Declaration on the Establishment of the New International Economic Order” (NIEO). According to members of a

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<sup>100</sup> The term “Fourth World” was coined in a book by George Manuel and Michael Posluns titled *The Fourth World: an Indian Reality* (1974). The term was quickly popularized. The University of Florida library, for example, lists 214 hits with the phrase “fourth world” in the title, most of them from the two decades following this first publication (search performed 22 April 2009).

team of analysts from the UN, “the historic importance of this proposal derives from the fact that it was an authentic Third World initiative, launched at a time of probably the peak bargaining power of the poor countries in the entire postwar period,” and was “fundamentally concerned with a radical restructuring of international economic, financial, and political relations” (Jolly et al. 2004: 121). Overall, however, “on the most important proposals made by the developing countries, almost nothing was done” (Jolly et al. 2004: 23).

At the same time anthropologists shepherded a growing discipline called *ethnodevelopment*, which provided an analysis of development from perspective of the global South. Scholars such as Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira (1972 [1964]) and Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1970, 1990) helped to elucidate alternative models of development that highlighted the ways in which access to political and economic power was denied to certain populations despite the emergence of sustainability-related language that advised inclusive and participatory political arrangements.<sup>101</sup> Disenfranchised by their nation-states, some indigenous and traditional peoples began to increasingly rely on non-governmental groups for support. Non-governmental organizations became important mediators between indigenous and local peoples, international political regimes, and multi-lateral development agencies (Conklin and Graham 1995; Wright 2009). These NGOs, however, were often selective regarding which individuals and communities were targeted for sustainable development, perpetuating the symbolic and political dominance “of certain key figures in the politics, and the imposition of a model that privileged and shaped specific indigenous organization, while excluding others” (Wright 2009: 204).<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> I am deeply indebted to Robin Wright for introducing me to this literature, and for noting its significance to this history.

<sup>102</sup> The differences between ethnodevelopment and sustainable development beg for further study. This is a potentially fruitful area for further research.

A second Barbados Conference was held in 1977, and many of the participants in this second conference were indigenous activists, marking the extension of their influence into international policy regimes. Overall however, the lack of any concrete results following the Barbados declarations was disappointing for many indigenous peoples and the social scientists that supported their cause. Although there were few results that followed directly from these conferences, the ideas first vetted here and carried forth thereafter by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) did influence the direction of development in a positive direction. The authors of the UN Intellectual History Project quoted Jan Pronk (deputy secretary of UNCTAD and minister of the Netherlands), who related the NIEO and the work of UNCTAD: “UNCTAD...had a major analytical input to international thinking....A little radical, but there would not have been any progress without such a challenge. It was a confrontational attitude on the basis of the Group of 77’s New International Economic Order approach (Emmerij, Jolly and Weiss 2001: 53).<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the pressures placed on development organizations and related political and economic institutions were at least in part responsible for these groups’ hiring of several anthropologists in an effort to increase their ability to respect and protect the cultures with which they interacted on the ground.

### **The Brandt Commission**

Concern about the relationships between the developed and developing world also came from the global North. In 1977 chair of the World Bank Robert McNamara asked former chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany Willy Brandt to head a commission that would

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<sup>103</sup> The Group of 77, or G-77 is the group of countries originally referred to as the Third World (the term credited to Alfred Sauvy in the 1960s). There are now some 135 countries that are part of this group. Emmerij, Jolly and Weiss, members of the UN Intellectual History Project, suggested that the work of UNCTAD was largely focused around the G-77’s critique of development and trade. Beginning in the 1980s, their *Trade and Development Reports* were envisioned as a counterpoint to the World Bank’s *World Development Report*, highlighting a different set of issues (Emmerij, Jolly and Weiss 2001: 54).

systematically analyze the main problems with development, particularly in light of the increasing dialogue between the global North and South and the subsequent failure of negotiations to systematize the NIEO.<sup>104</sup> According to UN collaborators, the Brandt Commission's recommendations were "ultimately anchored in the great moral imperatives that...are as valid internationally as they were and are nationally," and appealed "to values more than to rational calculations" (Therien 2005: 33).<sup>105</sup> The Commission published two reports, *North-South: A Program for Survival* (1980), and *Common Crisis: North-South: Co-operation for World Recovery* (1983), both of which advanced Brandt's idea that all nations had a "mutual interest" in generating just and equitable development.

Most of the participants (half from the global North and half from the global South) favored a social-democratic perspective,<sup>106</sup> and while the Commission's ideas may have been somewhat innovative, the payoff was less than hoped for as the Commission's findings were released into a world ripe with political strife.<sup>107</sup> Thus, despite repeated attempts by Third and Fourth World activists and the Brandt Commission to make the case that the prevailing

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<sup>104</sup> Although McNamara issued the call for the commission, the World Bank did not fund the project. The Dutch government paid for roughly half of the costs, while other nations, OPEC, and other research centers bore the remainder of the cost (Therien 2005: 31).

<sup>105</sup> The commission proposed a four-pronged solution to development problems which included: 1) transfer of resources from North to South, 2) a global energy policy, 3) international food initiative, and 4) reform of international institutions. Essentially, the Report recommended a global trade regime based on *rules* rather than power relations (Therien 2005: 34). This would at least make strides toward preventing particularly powerful countries from taking extreme advantage of those with less political or economic power.

<sup>106</sup> The participants in the Commission tended to favor the social democratic development approach advocated by the United Nations (including the Economic and Social Council [ECOSOC], United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], and International Labor Organization [ILO]) over the approach epitomized by the Bretton Woods Institutions (the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [GATT], the International Monetary Fund [IMF], the World Trade Organization [WTO] and the World Bank). While the latter are preoccupied primarily with (neo)liberalization, the UN paradigm adopts a more social-democratic view of development.

<sup>107</sup> Another surge in oil prices in 1979 related to the Islamist Revolution in Iran, the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the election of Margaret Thatcher in the UK (1979), and Ronald Regan (1980) in the United States (both of whom supported the Bretton Woods development paradigm over the UN paradigm) all served to limit the influence of the Brandt report (Therien 2005: 30).

conceptions of environmentally and socially responsible development were not sustainable in most cases, these concerns were transposed into the language of further economic globalization and integration of global markets.

### **Security and Sustainability**

Former Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme, chair of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, made deep ripples in the international scene in 1982 by bringing national and global security to the attention of world leaders. The Palme Commission (as it came to be called) was modeled after the Brandt Commission, and focused on: 1) charting a long-term course toward nuclear disarmament; 2) focusing attention on short-term arms control; and 3) stimulating public debate over security issues.<sup>108</sup>

The Report of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, called *Common Security: A Programme for Disarmament* (1982), suggested that the build-up of long-range missiles in Eastern Europe, far from ensuring security, was actually compromising not only the security of the Cold War states but of the global community. They challenged the long revered language of nuclear deterrence with a doctrine of *mutual interest* in avoiding nuclear conflict. Following the language of “common crisis” offered by Brandt, the Palme Commission declared that addressing the threat of nuclear war was central to “common security” (Wiseman 2005: 46-75). Although largely overlooked by top leaders from the two primary Cold War nations, the Commission’s recommendations were adopted and adapted under cover by various

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<sup>108</sup> The impetus for this gathering included an increasingly frigid Cold War between the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and the US. Escalation of the cold war was due in part to the modernization of NATO’s intermediate nuclear arms in the form of Cruise and Pershing II missiles, plans to build the MX missile system (an offensive system), and a new set of strategies touted by NATO leaders that, at least to those on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, looked like official approval of a nuclear first strike policy (Wiseman 2005: 49).

high-ranking officials. By the end of the 1980s concepts related to common security had journeyed across the Atlantic, through the Curtain, and back again.<sup>109</sup>

Recall that Pinchot's brand of sustainability (in Chapter 4) included national security as a central concern, but it was thereafter seldom considered related to sustainability until the latter part of the twentieth century. Although the Palme Commission is rarely mentioned as part of the history of sustainability, it is important to the development of sustainability discourse for three reasons. First, security and peace are pre-requisites for sustainability. Wars and other armed conflicts are some of the most ecologically devastating activities in which humans engage. Second, the Commission framed such common security (or in another manifestation of the same concept, cooperative security) as pivotal for the global community, noting a profound interdependence, particularly in matters of nuclear warfare. Third, it demonstrates the potential political power of such commissions.<sup>110</sup>

### **The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)**

In the midst of these global concerns about thermonuclear warfare and unpleasant encounters with earth's limits, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) was convened in 1983 by UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar.<sup>111</sup>

Chairperson Gro Brundtland stated in the foreword of *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987), the

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<sup>109</sup> Former diplomat Geoffrey Wiseman suggests that although it appeared that the Commission's recommendations fell on deaf (because overly politicized) ears, the concept of common security was "re-labeled" and re-deployed in different terms by conservative politicians on both sides of the Atlantic, and even behind the Iron Curtain (2005: 53).

<sup>110</sup> In 1990, Willy Brandt called together members from his own Commission, the Palme Commission, the Brundtland Commission, and others to generate a more effective system of global security and governance in the aftermath of the Cold War. The Stockholm Initiative on Global Governance published their results in 1995 (the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN) under the title *Our Global Neighborhood* (Commission on Global Governance 1995). The title was designed to highlight the importance of security, peace, and institutional reform to the entire, interdependent global community (Jolly et al. 2004: 178).

<sup>111</sup> While the Brant and Palme Commissions had been comprised primarily of a smaller number of politically important people, the Brundtland Commission was made up of environmental specialists as well as high-ranking UN and other political figures. Members, then, represented both environmental interests and development interests (Rist 1997: 179).

publication of the Commission's recommendations, that the WCED was to be a "third and compelling call for political action: After Brandt's *Programme for Survival and Common Crisis*, and after Palme's *Common Security*, would come *Our Common Future*" (WCED: x; quoted in Smith 2005: 76-98). Brundtland viewed her charge as one directly in line with the increasingly common recognition that global security, social and ecological problems were linked and moreover, were global in scope.<sup>112</sup>

Building on the foundations laid at Stockholm and in the Palme Commission, the Brundtland report paid special attention to the link between security and sustainability. Chapter 11 of *Our Common Future* is dedicated to fleshing out the links between peace, security, the environment, and development. The report suggested that the "possibility of nuclear war, or military conflict of a lesser scale involving weapons of mass destruction, is undoubtedly the gravest. Certain aspects of the issues of peace and security bear directly upon the concept of sustainable development. Indeed, they are central to it" (WCED1987: 290). They praise the Reagan and Gorbachev administrations (of the United States and the then USSR, respectively) for beginning the end of the Cold War with discussions of warhead reduction. Brundtland and her collaborators, drawing on the positive statements of common security provided by the Palme Commission, stated that

the level of armaments and the destruction they could bring about bear no relation to the political conflict that triggered the arms competition in the first place. Nations must not become prisoners of their own arms race....They must face the common challenge of providing sustainable development (1987: 304).

Finally, the Commission argued in nearly every chapter that more stringent national governing bodies and regulations were required to prevent environmental degradation, and put

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<sup>112</sup> While many trace the term sustainability in its contemporary form to this Commission, it is clear that the ideas did not emerge here. These leaders stood on the intellectual shoulders of other, earlier politicians and leaders, who had already wrestled with the complex task of combining ecological, social and economic concern.

exceptional emphasis on the importance of international governance for preventing problems associated with management of the commons. Invoking the metaphor of the “wheel of life” (1987: 262, typically attributed to indigenous cultures), *Our Common Future* noted that common resources were marked by an interdependence not limited by the political boundaries drawn by humans and their cultures. Thus, larger and more cooperative international governance regimes were required to protect resources such as oceans, air, Antarctica, and outer space (1987: 261-287). In many ways, their advocacy of larger-scale management regimes is reminiscent of Hardin’s and Ophul’s suggestions that a broader sort of governance is needed. Brundtland and her colleagues stop short of directly endorsing the sort of coercion (agreed upon or otherwise) advocated by Hardin and Ophuls, but the influence of these earlier resource management ideas is clear in this international venue.

Interestingly, the Brundtland Commission report preserved the idea put forth in Stockholm fifteen years earlier that raising standards of living in the developing world could only be achieved by stretching carrying capacity so that economic growth could continue unabated.<sup>113</sup> This was one of the reasons that some critics of the WCED dismissed it as inconsistent, since it defended both economic growth and living within the carrying capacity of the planet. For example, historian Donald Worster called sustainability (particularly in its manifestation related to development) a “magic word of consensus” (1993: 144), which allowed “the capitalist and the socialist, the scientist and the economist, the impoverished masses and the urban elites...[to] happily march together on a straight and easy path, if they did not ask any potentially divisive questions about where they were going” (144-145). But upon careful

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<sup>113</sup> As Jim McNeill, Secretary-General of the Brundtland Commission stated, “the maxim for sustainable development is not ‘limits to growth’; it is ‘the growth of limits...many present limits can be expanded, through changes in modes of decision-making, through changes in some domestic and international policies, and through massive investments in human and resource capital” (quoted in Smith 2005: 79).

analysis, the Brundtland report did not imply that sacrifices were unnecessary. In its introductory chapter the report dismisses as fantasy any suggestion that there will be no difficult choices: “sustainable development can only be pursued if population size and growth are in harmony with the changing productive potential of the ecosystem....We do not pretend that the process is easy or straightforward. Painful choices have to be made” (WCED 1987: 9). To be fair to the authors of the report, they believed that significant changes in the distribution of resources, the application of technologies, and social organization were necessary before economic growth could be considered to be equitable and good (WCED 1987: 8). While the search for sustainability is tied to technological improvements that stretch the biosphere’s ability to absorb the effects of human activity (WCED 1987: 9), “ultimate limits there are, and sustainability requires that long before these are reached, the world must ensure equitable access to the constrained resource and reorient technological efforts to relieve the pressure” (WCED 1987: 45).

The Brundtland definition of sustainability continues to be the most widely used and visible one.<sup>114</sup> The year after *Our Common Future* was published (1987), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) released a work intended for a more popular audience. The title, *Man Belongs to the Earth* (UNESCO 1988) was drawn from a now famous speech ostensibly given by Chief Seattle, and the work was intended to expand ethical horizons by promoting a spirituality of connection that had become an increasingly frequent accompaniment to sustainability.<sup>115</sup> This publication’s implication that humans are indebted to a larger biosphere is especially provocative, particularly given the strong

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<sup>114</sup> Their basic definition is that development is sustainable if “[humanity] meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987: 8).

<sup>115</sup> The authenticity of the speech has been contested. See Michael McKenzie’s entry “Seattle (Sealth), Chief” in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (2005: 1511-1512).

anthropocentric tone of *Our Common Future*. For example, the Brundtland report concluded the introduction with the statement that “First and foremost, this Commission has been concerned with people—of all countries and walks of life. And it is to people that we address our report” (1987: 23). *Man Belongs to the Earth* (1988), however, clearly invokes a conception of humans’ place in the natural order that implies a greater human dependence on the ecological matrix within which humans persist. Later meetings retained influences from both the more anthropocentric tone of Brundtland and the more biocentric sentiment of the UNESCO report, though the human-centered approach continues to dominate sustainability discourse.

### **Beyond Brundtland: The Road to Rio**

The same year that the Brundtland Commission completed *Our Common Future* (and two years prior to the UNESCO publication), His Royal Highness Prince Phillip (the husband of the United Kingdom’s monarch Queen Elizabeth II),<sup>116</sup> leader of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), invited six of the world’s religious leaders to Assisi, with their stated goals to discuss:

- how the environmental crisis is a mental and ethical crisis due, in part, to powerful, predominantly Western and Christian world-views that encourage materialistic, dualistic, anthropocentric, and utilitarian concepts of nature;<sup>117</sup>
- that environmental organizations and politicians are victims of the same economic and technological thinking that provoked the crisis;
- that alternative world-views and ethics must be respected to counter current dominant thinking; and
- that the world’s religions constitute enormous human and spiritual potentials (Jensen 1999: 494).

This early meeting of environmental and religious minds had two important offspring. First, according to Jeff Golliver, it inspired some at the 1993 Parliament of Religions, under the leadership of Hans Kung, to propose the *Declaration toward a Global Ethic* (1999: 446).

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<sup>116</sup> Philip was born Prince of Greece and Denmark, but renounced these titles when he married Elizabeth in 1947, becoming the Duke of Edinburgh, the Earl of Merioneth and Baron Greenwich (see the information on Philip on the royal family’s website at <http://www.royal.gov.uk/OutPut/Page5551.asp>, accessed 20 January 2009).

<sup>117</sup> See for example Lynn White’s now famous article “The Historic Roots of the Ecologic Crisis” (1967).

Second, in 1995 (nine years following the first meeting), HRH Prince Phillip, the WWF and a larger number of religious leaders (representing 11 “world faiths” this time) met in the UK to revise their previous commitments. It was during this second meeting that the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) was formed under the leadership of Martin Palmer (Jensen 1999: 494). The ARC is one of the few non-governmental conservation organizations that have maintained long-standing working relationships with the WWF, the World Bank, and the United Nations, all of which have their own working definitions of sustainability (see Chapter 8 for more details about ARC).

Between 1987 when the Brundtland Commission released its findings and the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio, two other important events helped to solidify the importance of religion and spirituality to the quest for sustainability. The first came in 1990 when over thirty well-known scientists composed “An Open Letter to the Religious Community,” an invitation for people of faith to join with scientific leaders to find common cause in the protection of the earth. The scientists noted two primary reasons for issuing their call: 1) religious leaders had long been a significant force leading change toward peace, human rights, and social justice, and 2) the scientists reported that many of them “had profound experiences of awe and reverence before the universe” (Chapman et al. 2000: 14), and that “efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred” (Chapman et al. 2000: 13). The second significant moment came when these combined constituencies, following a conference in 1992, released their “Declaration of the Mission to Washington of the Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment,” which argued that religious and scientific leaders had an obligation, in the face of the impending environmental crisis, to work together toward the common good:

Insofar as our peril arises from a neglect of moral values, human pride, arrogance, inattention, greed, improvidence, and a penchant for the short term over the long, religion has an essential role to play. Insofar as our peril arises from our ignorance of the intricate interconnectedness of nature, science has an essential role to play (quoted in Chapman et al. 2000: 15-16).

The importance of global interconnectedness and moral values to the sustainability ferment was important in these Northern, institutionalized venues (that is, within the established world religions and the scientific establishment). In 1988 when Mikhail Gorbachev assumed the role of Prime Minister in the USSR, added optimism about the global future helped to preserve the idea of sustainable development. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 this optimistic momentum was seized upon and translated into the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED), a significant step in creating global awareness of environmental and social problems.

The Brundlandt Report concluded by suggesting that the UN sponsor “an international Conference...to review progress and promote follow-up arrangements that will be needed...to set benchmarks and to maintain human progress” (WCED 1987: 343; Rist 1997: 188). The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was the response to this call. The Conference drew together over one hundred heads of state and thousands of other delegates from all over the world and was the largest such gathering of heads of state and government to that time (Rist 1997: 188), indicating the high profile concern garnered by environmental and social problems (Baker 2006: 55).

In preparation for the upcoming UNCED (sponsored by the United Nations, and attended by representatives of the “establishment”) a “World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Territory, Environment and Development” was held the week prior to the UNCED at Kari Oca, a site on the outskirts of Rio (perhaps symbolically highlighting the marginalization of indigenous

voices in the development dialog). Invoking the metaphor of “Mother Earth” or “Pacha Mama,” the indigenous peoples drew attention to their own blending of knowledge and spirituality. They claimed that they were “knowers of nature” and that their “resistance, [their] strength comes from a spiritual relationship with nature” (Hart 2005: 1764). One indigenous activist noted that they had “come to share with the world and the United Nations our way of thinking, our visions, our way of life, an alternative. We do not speak of the ‘environment’; we speak of the spiritual and physical world in which we live” (quoted from Valerio Grefa, Ecuador, in Hart 2005: 1763).

For Grefa and others, the Joint Appeal from scientists and religious leaders (discussed above) was important, but endorsed a rift in epistemological approaches (between science and religion) not approved by indigenous peoples. Tadadaho of the Haudenosaunee Nation echoed Valerio’s sentiments, “We need to seek a balance between the spiritual and the political. There should not be separation of spirituality from political or social life. Americans have two houses, one for government and one for prayer. Our people keep them together” (Hart 2005: 1763).<sup>118</sup> This “People’s Summit,” as it is often called, drew some 20,000 additional people to Rio. This group, though philosophically, intellectually and geographically separated from the UN sponsored Earth Summit highlighted a different set of issues, including food production and alternative economic and environmental positions (Rist 1997: 188, 191). Thus, the idea of sustainability, and its major benchmarks, have been attended and promoted by both institutional and elite sectors of society as well as resistance-oriented members of civil society.

Though its overall contribution to the quest for sustainability is still contested, the Earth Summit did result in five important outcomes:

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<sup>118</sup> “Life,” as Oren Lyons, Haudenosaunee faithkeeper reminded the gathered peoples, “is community” (quoted in Hart 2005: 1763).

- 1) the approval of the Rio Declaration, which included 27 principles of sustainable development (Rist 1997: 189; Baker 2006: 55);<sup>119</sup>
- 2) the approval of Agenda 21, a document of over 800 pages which provided sets of guidelines for implementing sustainable development with particular attention to local communities;<sup>120</sup>
- 3) the creation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which drew on the findings of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC);<sup>121</sup>
- 4) the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), which endorsed the value of indigenous ecological knowledge, and stated that sovereign nations should have rights to the biological resources of their territory;<sup>122</sup>
- 5) the Declaration on Forest Principles, which created broad frameworks and recommendations for sustainable use of forest resources.

In addition, in a directly religious overture at the 1992 Earth Summit, chairman Maurice Strong and several other delegates endorsed what they called the “Earth Charter.” Promoted on the international stage largely by religion scholars, the Earth Charter invokes a global ethic grounded in a moral anthropology of kinship with other humans and non-human entities that is in many ways religious (Rockefeller 2005; Taylor 2009: 184-187). Beyond the endorsement of social justice and equity and the incorporation of environmental concerns into the goals of political bodies such as the UN, the 2002 Earth Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa<sup>123</sup> saw evidence for the possible early emergence of what some believe may be a sort of global civic

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<sup>119</sup> The principles were explicitly normative and prescriptive, recommending that national governments take responsibility for wise resource use and conservation, endorsing the precautionary principle and notions of both inter- and intra-generational equity (Baker 2006: 55).

<sup>120</sup> Moreover, it created a Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) which was to report to the Economic and Social Council of the UN (Baker 2006: 56; Rist 1997: 190).

<sup>121</sup> Five years down the road, this body created an international set of standards in Japan, referred to as the Kyoto Protocol, which every major industrialized nation, with the exception of the United States, has signed. Even in these early days, the US refused to be bound by specific emissions reduction goals, and thus the Framework agreement was signed by over 150 countries, but without any concrete commitments for improvement.

<sup>122</sup> President George H. Bush and the US representatives at the Summit refused to sign the CBD, which Bush claimed would cause financial strain to the US biotechnology industry (Baker 2006: 96; Rist 1997: 189).

<sup>123</sup> This summit is sometimes referred to as Rio+10.

earth religion (Taylor 2004).<sup>124</sup> During the opening ceremony, participants were treated to a performance that depicted the common emergence of humanity in Africa, and suggested that humanity's past, and also its future, must be bounded by the limits of a finite world. It is worth quoting Taylor's recounting of the event:

In this musical theater, a child was found wondering what happened to the forests and to the animals. In response, in prose and song, a cosmogony compatible both with evolution and Gaia spirituality was articulated. The earth was conceived of as a beneficent person while at the same time, the emergence of complex life on earth was depicted in a way suggesting an evolutionary unfolding (2004: 1003).

Taylor argued, "It may be that such a religion, in which the evolutionary story, embedded in the broader Universe Story, fosters a reverence for life and diverse practices to protect and restore its diverse forms, will play a major role in the religious future of humanity" (2004: 1004). That remains to be seen, but this evolutionary story has certainly played a role in the rhetoric of sustainable development.

Outcomes, in most cases, have been more modest than participants at Rio and Johannesburg hoped.<sup>125</sup> For now, it is important to note that sustainability rapidly developed from being relevant primarily to individual behaviors,<sup>126</sup> to national sovereignty and health,<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Taylor's most extensive analysis of the evidence of such earth religion at the WSSD is in the forthcoming *Dark Green Religion* (2009), and includes discussion of the Earth Charter celebrations during the meeting, pilgrimages to World Heritage sites, and events at civil society venues. There, following the political theorist Daniel Deudney, Taylor called this civic earth religion "terrapolitan earth religion" (Taylor 2009). For Deudney's use of the phrase, see Daniel Deudney, "Global Village Sovereignty: Intergenerational Sovereign Publics, Federal-Republican Earth Constitutions, and Planetary Identities," in *The Greening of Sovereignty in World Politics*, ed. Karen Litfin, ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

<sup>125</sup> Such ideas vetted in international venues are difficult to enact because each is a non-binding resolution, which means that even countries that sign on to their principles cannot be held legally responsible for not adhering to them. Moreover, all such negotiations at the international level have honored the principle of subsidiarity, which suggests that decision making and binding laws should be left to the smallest constituent legislative body.

<sup>126</sup> For example when earlier cognates of sustainability were related to personal consumption choices and resource use, for example during World War II.

<sup>127</sup> Concern for clean water and air, for example, became a national issue in the decades after WWII when increasing consumption, encouraged by the federal government, was found to have detrimental environmental costs.

and finally to the global community<sup>128</sup> in a short period of time. Sustainability as an overall goal is now taken for granted in many venues and organizations, and an ecologically-grounded spirituality is an increasingly frequent complement to the discourse of sustainable development. These religious narratives of interdependence undergird both global subcultures of resistance, and the American and European mainstream. According to some, a new sustainability ethic is implied by the metanarrative of sustainability. As noted anthropologist Darrell Posey put it, “on the level of international policy-making, the emergence of a new paradigm encapsulated by a global ethic centers on the terms *sustainability* and *sustainable development*” (Posey 1999: 446).<sup>129</sup>

### **Contemporary Contributions to the Religious Dimension of Sustainability from Institutionalized Religions, Political Institutions, and Subcultures of Resistance**

John Smith of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) “always considered spirituality a sort of fourth dimension of sustainability,” and was at one time at work on a dissertation on that topic (interview 29 May 2008).<sup>130</sup> Smith is a “devout” atheist and socialist who nonetheless believes that developing a sustainable and just culture is impossible without religious people and communities. Despite his atheism he believes that his work cultivates the

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<sup>128</sup> Although the Stockholm convention is often noted as the first “international” recognition of sustainability, similar ideas were vetted earlier by religious groups, as noted above.

<sup>129</sup> It is important to note that Darrell Posey, who has played an important role in popularizing traditional ecological knowledge and the importance of indigenous peoples to sustainable development and conservation, has been criticized by other anthropologists for helping to perpetuate rather romantic portraits of indigenous peoples (Parker 1993). To the extent that such criticisms are correct, the idea that a global sustainability ethic is directly related to indigenous cosmologies or some traditional ecological ethics may help perpetuate to a colonialist impulse within international sustainability circles. For more discussion see pp. 137-140.

<sup>130</sup> This is in addition to the usual “three pillars of sustainability,” the ecological, social, and economic dimensions.

sort of mindfulness that is an exercise in spiritual formation. So do many others who work within the broad arena of sustainability.<sup>131</sup>

This and other interviews with NGO leaders suggest that, whether religious in the traditional sense or not, they are doing religious work by intentionally facilitating new forms of exchange, providing interpersonal and community cohesion, and focusing the desire of communities of people. Some of the common themes with religious dimensions in the literature related to sustainability have become clear already: the idea that humans are deeply interconnected to other biological, ecological or cosmological wholes, the importance of individual and ecological limits, and an ethic of interpersonal empathy. Normative concepts are typically embedded in narratives, particularly when they are shared with those outside the community to which those norms are native (Johnson 1993; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; MacIntyre 1984; Hauerwas 1981, especially pp. 1-87).

### **Institutional Religions and International Politics**

While many scholars have noted that political resistance movements typically deem attentiveness to traditional land tenure and use as particularly important, and have attended to the religious motivations for such resistance (Peterson 1997; Wright 1998; Mburu 2005: 957-961; Darlington 2005: 1629-1630; Taylor 1995: 334-354), less academic attention has been paid to the participation of religious groups in international political decision-making the operations of development agencies (though Chapman et al. [2000] is a notable exception, and Taylor [2009] has begun to help fill the gap).<sup>132</sup> Religious ideas, particularly invocations of interdependence

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<sup>131</sup> Like many in Northern Europe and the United States in recent decades, he generally identifies religion with institutional structure and hierarchies, but believes that spirituality is more personal, and avoids some of the pitfalls that accompany organized religion.

<sup>132</sup> Susan Delgado's book *Shaking the Gates of Hell* (2007) focuses on faith-based resistance to corporate globalization, but I am more interested here in instances of cooperation and support.

and the importance of interpersonal empathy, did not evolve independently within subcultures of resistance and among structures of political and economic power. Rather, at several points they cross-pollinated, creating new manifestations of old religious ideas, and sometimes entirely new narratives.<sup>133</sup>

The Committee of Religious NGOs, those who characterize their work as religious, spiritual, or ethical, have been accredited and actively involved in United Nations proceedings since its infancy (Neff 2007; Pigem et al. 2007).<sup>134</sup> But the interest of national and international political bodies in religious belief and practice has increased since the turn of the new millennium, in part because religious fundamentalisms have been re-invigorated in North America and in the Near and Far East. While most of Europe has in the past century steered a course toward increasing secularism, traditional religious groups continue to control large proportions of land, capital, and political influence. For instance, former Prime Minister of Great Britain Tony Blair recently founded a non-profit group called the Tony Blair Faith Foundation dedicated to “proving that collaboration among those of different religious faiths can help address some of the world’s most pressing social problems” (Elliot 2008: 26-30).<sup>135</sup> In this,

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<sup>133</sup> The invocation of global civic nature reverence at UN sponsored events such as the Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg Earth Summits is probably a relatively new sort of religious production. I treat it here as but one stream of religion that exercises influence on the sustainability metanarrative, along with the world religions, which have been active in sustainability for decades, and other subcultures of resistance who resonate with non-mainstream religious traditions.

<sup>134</sup> Pigem et al. stated in a footnote that religious groups have been involved since 1972, but UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has pointed out that faith-based NGOs were present at the organization’s founding. These are drawn from combined press releases offered by the Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE) each month. This particular communiqué from FORE was received on 14 October 2007.

<sup>135</sup> Blair identified resource access and use as the heart of the world’s social problems, and therefore a key focus for religions aimed at promoting social justice.

Blair joins former Soviet Union President Mikail Gorbachev, founder of a group called “Green Cross,” which promotes environmental justice along with a sort of green global ethic.<sup>136</sup>

Since the Joint Appeal from religious leaders and scientists (see this Chapter, pp. 96-97), religious scholars and practitioners have often worked with scientific leaders to promote acknowledgement of the importance of religious narratives in the search for sustainability. The United Nations Environment Programme generates several press statements each year detailing the engagement of religious groups and leaders with their projects. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently argued that the UN should play a crucial role in promoting cultural diversity and dialog, and noted that religion and its free exercise were fundamental to achieving dialogue and cultural respect (UN 2007, press release).<sup>137</sup> At the United Nations’ inception in 1945 forty-two faith-based organizations were accredited, while today the number stands at over 400 religious non-governmental organizations (Neff 2007, quoting Ban Ki-moon). Not only are religious groups reaching out to international political institutions and development organizations, but these political bodies and development organizations are reaching back, inviting faith groups to exercise their political will, their economic muscle, and their collective conscience to achieve a more sustainable and just global community.

In an address to evangelical Christians Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon quoted Isaiah 58:10 to great applause, reminding his audience that service to the poor stands at the center of the Christian vocation.<sup>138</sup> Ki-moon also acknowledged that while the UN must necessarily strive to stand outside any particular religious tradition, in a very real sense the UN is itself “an

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<sup>136</sup> See <http://www.gci.ch/>.

<sup>137</sup> Accessed online 1 November 2007, received via email from the Forum on Religion and Ecology.

<sup>138</sup> The verse reads “If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday” (NRSV).

instrument of faith...inspired by what unites, not by what divides, the great religions of the world” (Ki-moon 2007). He went on to note that the key motivation for participating in the quest for a better, more sustainable world was often religious:

If you ask the people who work for the United Nations what motivates them—whether they are building peace in Timor-Leste, fighting human trafficking in Eastern Europe, or battling AIDS in Africa—many reply in a language of faith. They see what they do as a mission, not a job (Ki-moon 2007).<sup>139</sup>

This focus on “what unites us” illustrates why a global civil earth religion might be a frequent accompaniment to UN development and sustainability discourse. Invoking emotively tied stories that are understood as somehow spiritual or religious is an easy way to stimulate cross-cultural moral sensibilities. As Scott Thomas has argued, the global resurgence of religion and its importance to global politics was stimulated by and integrally related to criticisms of modernity, also often one of the targets of sustainability discourse (2005). Sustainability then, as I have described its history here, is deeply related to and dependent upon the global resurgence of religion in international politics—the emergence of sustainability and the resurgence of religion may be viewed as complementary trends.

The Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE), spearheaded by religion scholars Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (who in 2007 moved from Bucknell University to the Yale School of Forestry—founded by sustainability ancestor Gifford Pinchot) has been instrumental in disseminating this “good news” about the increasing collaboration of religious groups and scientific and political elites. The UNEP press releases are collated and sent out by the Forum on a monthly basis.

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<sup>139</sup> In UNEP news clippings, forwarded by the Forum on Religion and Ecology 1 November 2007.

## Oppositional Subcultures and Sustainability

The interpersonal empathy involved in engaging other living creatures, and the ecosystems of which they are a part, is an often-cited and important piece of the moral milieu of subcultures of resistance. These subcultures generally see their primary task as opposing, or hampering the “progress” aimed at by multilateral development organizations (such as the World Bank) and international political regimes (such as the United Nations). Nonetheless, they frequently use parallel if not nearly identical motivational tropes, and also intentionally cultivate relationships with those outside of their particular communities of accountability for strategic reasons. Making explicit these two sets of stories, subcultural and mainstream, may help them to find common ground for the common pursuit of sustainable living.

Highlighting resistance as the core meaning of sustainability, Jennifer Sumner argued that sustainability is best defined as the creation of a set of structures and processes that invigorate and grow the civil commons.<sup>140</sup> At the heart of the civil commons she imagines “the three building blocks of sustainability: counter-hegemony, dialogue, and life values” (2005: 112). For Sumner, sustainability is defined as an alternative vision that challenges a) business as usual, b) existing social structures, and c) prevailing economic wisdom. More than that, however, Sumner suggests that the search for sustainability is rooted in our affinity with the deep interrelatedness of the world, and helps to repair damaged relationships with the ecological matrix cultures depend upon:

empathetic ways of knowing need to be woven into a new understanding of sustainability if we are to survive as a species...they can help foster the kind of relationship with the environment that stresses the interconnectedness of all things. Ultimately, we must come

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<sup>140</sup> She defines the “civil commons,” drawing on McMurtry, thusly: “*it is society’s organized and community-funded capacity of universally accessible resources to provide for the life preservation and growth of society’s members and their environmental life-host*” (2005: 96, italics in original).

[presumably at a cultural scale] to know what the Buddha said in his first sermon: Everything depends in its origination on everything else at once and in unison (2005: 102).

What Sumner envisions as “building” the civil commons is essentially an exercise in recognizing the commonalities among various subcultures of resistance in comparison to the prevailing socio-politico-economic powers.<sup>141</sup> Paul Hawken, immersed for over thirty years in the sustainability milieu, terms this complex cross-fertilization of groups “intertwining,” a new set of partnerships facilitated by technologies and social relations that compress time and space, bringing the world ever closer (2007: 5). Social and ecological resistance movements, as noted above, find common cause in cultural streams like the sustainability milieu, but their collaboration predates the contemporary emergence of sustainability (see Garè 1998).

For example, in the United States, many environmentalist subcultures look to Native Americans as bearers of inherently “environmental” ethical perspectives, and as the first real “resistance” to the colonizing forces that ultimately lay at the root of capitalistic societies. Native American resistance, moreover, enjoyed a revitalization in the late 1960s and 1970s when indigenous rights emerged for the first time into the consciousness of international political bodies as human rights violations committed in the name of development became increasingly common.<sup>142</sup> Here in the U.S. for example, in 1969, some two hundred Native Americans and supporters occupied the island of Alcatraz for over a year, calling themselves the “Indians of All Tribes” to protest treatment of Native Americans (Deloria 1992). In 1973, a standoff at Wounded Knee led by American Indian Movement (AIM) activists resulted in some violence, and the arrest of many Lakota and other Native Americans protesting governmental insensitivity

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<sup>141</sup> There is significant resonance here with Gare’s claim (1998) that various intellectual streams must join together to create a new metanarrative.

<sup>142</sup> Such violations have always been ongoing, but they came into international political consciousness around the late 1960s.

to native land rights.<sup>143</sup> It is clear that such episodes impact both Native American communities and other subcultural constituencies in the US. Many Native Americans, for example, have taken these events and weaved them into a new narrative of resistance connected to traditional lifeways (see for example Hand 1998).

Sarah Pike, for example, in her excellent treatment of New Age and Neopagan subcultures noted that both groups, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, drew on Native American traditions to motivate different ways of relating to other humans and non-humans:

The desire to share in native peoples' perceived harmony with nature become a common theme of the 1960s counterculture and in 1970s Neopaganism and New Age communities....New Agers acted to fill this need (for sacred spaces) by resacralizing the landscape with a combination of indigenous myths and stories of UFOs and ancient lost civilizations (Pike 2004).

In addition, Bron Taylor has highlighted the coalitions formed by environmentalists and Native American groups, for instance in protest of the construction of large telescopes on the summit of Mt. Graham, a sacred place for many Apache (Taylor 1997).

These and other subcultures of resistance, though they differ in their basic tenets and foci, tend to exhibit some similarities. Taylor has argued for example that these groups “generally view the animistic, pantheistic, and/or panentheistic spiritualities of indigenous peoples, or certain religions originating in Asia, as offering positive environmental values superior to those found in largescale, centralized, monotheistic societies” (2005: 603). Grassroots social movements, even if not catalyzed by ecological concerns, tend to recognize that the forces they resist, typically governance by outside elites and disruption of traditional land tenure, are intimately related to deterioration of habitats and quality of life. Taylor suggested that

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<sup>143</sup> The first contribution from Wounded Knee to the American moral imagination (or conscience) came in 1893 when over 200 women and children and men were killed by federal soldiers for their persistent practice of the Ghost Dance, a millenarian religious movement that enjoyed pan-Indian popularity in the late 1800s. The 1973 incident recalled this deep wrong in profound ways, bridging past events with (then) present affect.

*“renewing sustainable lifeways is the overall objective of popular ecological resistance movements, and this depends on the restoration of the commons”* (Taylor 1995: 334-354, italics his). Extending the analysis beyond ecological movements to grassroots social and political resistance, Taylor concluded that many of these subcultures embrace a spirituality of connection which focuses on relationships between human beings, and between humans and the non-human worlds .

Of course, many questions have been raised about the “authenticity” of such cultural recombination and borrowing, particularly with regard to New Age and Neopagan appropriations of indigenous ritual (see Chidester 2005a; Harner 1990; Krech III 1999). What is clear, however, is that they help some people to navigate the complex worlds they find themselves a part of, and also impact popular culture. Thus, as David Chidester noted in his book *Authentic Fakes* (2005a), whether religions are authentic or inauthentic is important, but also important is noting that in either case they are expressive of personal values, motivate particular behaviors, and are therefore doing real religious work. My intention here is to provide a descriptive analysis of these trends, not to adjudicate whether or not they are instances of authentic religion. They are, however, performing real religious work. Most importantly for my purposes, I suggest that the notion of interconnectedness and interpersonal encounter has been disseminated through a broad cross-section of grassroots resistance movements as well as within mainstream institutions.

One of the most important avenues by which contemporary cultures learn about and define this interconnectedness is through the natural sciences. While science is not truly multicultural in its Western manifestations (Harding 1998), its methodology has been adopted by natural scientists across the globe. In Chapter 6 I examine the contributions of the life and

natural sciences to the religious dimensions of sustainability. First, however, I will offer some reflections on the globalization of sustainability discourse and how sustainability is envisioned from the nexus of civil society and international politics.

### **Discussion and Evaluation**

In my judgment the most convincing criticisms of sustainable development generally come from those who question the utility of pursuing sustainable development through the top-down promotion of a globally acceptable ethic. These critics suggest that even a common ethic coupled with improvements in efficiency, technology transfer, and the intention to promote more effective communication cannot untie the tricky knot of power relations among humans and their diverse social, political, and ecological systems. Locally-relevant values and knowledge are crucially important and should not, according to these critics, be diffused into a common ethic.

Some of these critics believe that sustainability can only succeed if nature is infused with some sort of intrinsic value, or if humans are able to embrace a new worldview. For example, reflecting on that “magic word of consensus, ‘sustainability’” (1993: 144), Worster suggested that there are three primary problems with the concept of sustainable development: 1) it suggests that the natural world exists primarily for human use; 2) even when humans acknowledge some limits on that use, there is an assumption that the carrying capacity of local or larger systems is easily determinable; and 3) such assumptions rest on the “unexamined acceptance of the traditional world-view of progressive, secular materialism...We are led to believe that sustainability can be achieved with those institutions and their values intact” (1993: 153-154). Worster goes on to invoke the idea of intrinsic value, arguing that “the living heritage of evolution has an intrinsic value that we have not created but only inherited and enjoyed” (154-155).

In his provocative work *Contesting Sustainability* (2001), Aidan Davison agreed with Worster that the optimistic assessments provided by definitions of sustainable development

offered hope only in the form of recycled slogans from modernity cloaked in ecological conscience. In documents like the Brundtland report, the hard edge of sustainable development, which requires sustained economic growth, “is wrapped...in the softer, alluring vision that sustainable development is gathering humanity together as one cooperative, caring community” (2001: 31). Contrary to such optimistic assessments from international commissions or agencies, Davison stated that “I counter such sanguine assessments with the argument that the appearance of either consensus or intellectual clarity in sustainable development discourses is superficial and deceptive” (2001: 37). Further, in Davison’s estimation, the appropriation of the term by instruments of the dominant culture certainly does not “indicate that ecological awareness has been smuggled into the core deliberations of the technological society. It indicates the exact opposite—namely, that the interests of the technological society have been smuggled into ecological awareness” (Davison 2001: 38).<sup>144</sup>

Certainly some manifestations of a global earth reverence are “dark green” (Taylor 2009). But Davison’s observation scrutinizes the genuineness of actors who invoke dark green themes in international political venues and corporate sustainability statements by suggesting that in many cases the apparitions of global civil earth religion are really, at bottom, anthropocentric and deployed primarily because of their strategic value in promoting particular policies. Sustainability may sometimes be tied to ideas about the intrinsic value of nature but more often it persists and often thrives in light green and light brown sustainability circles focused on human concerns.<sup>145</sup> As Davison has noted, the deployment of the term sustainability

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<sup>144</sup> Davison’s observation may call into question the veracity of statements in international political venues and corporate sustainability statements that invoke dark green religion.

<sup>145</sup> I do not here distinguish between intrinsic value and inherent worth, for such distinctions are irrelevant to any points I wish to make here. Paul Taylor provides a good elucidation of the differences between the two terms and their applicability to environmental ethics (1986: 71-80, especially 72-75).

has its shadow side also, and the term and its spiritual accompaniments can be wielded by corporate and government entities to perpetuate existing power structures or to marginalize particular groups. This is one of the fears that opponents of a global ethic frequently noted in my interviews.

Although some of my informants expressed worries about global ethics, particularly those who worked for international religious and interfaith NGOs, such ethics are often articulated at the international level by religious scholars and anthropologists, ostensibly people who are sensitive to the imposition of Western values and practices on marginalized peoples and who have strongly endorsed protecting bio-cultural diversity. In part then, fears about such a global ethics might be overstated (see Chapter 8 for more details). Certainly all groups that refer to religious narratives as background assumptions for their reasoning in international political venues are to some extent engaged in religious cultural production, though they have different understandings of their mission and approach.

Though there are significant differences between how religious advocates and secular conservation organizations approach sustainability, they also exhibit some common understandings of the causes of connected ecological and social crises. For example, one common belief is that these crises are at bottom *spiritual* crises, and that religion thus has a crucial role to play in correcting them. Leaders of all of the groups analyzed here have cited Lynn White's now famous essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" (1967) as one of the principal motivators for the "greening of religions." For example, White's essay is cited in the Foreword to every volume of the Harvard Series on World Religions and Ecology (conceived and supervised by Tucker and Grim), seminal Christian creation care texts (Schaefer 1970; Wilkinson 1980), as well as in a joint publication by the World Bank and the World Wildlife

Fund (Dudley, Higgins-Zogib, and Mansourian 2005). One of White's most important points was that the Judeo-Christian "dominion" theme in the book of Genesis exhibited an elective affinity for certain technological advances in Europe in the Middle Ages, contributing to a culture that overexploited natural resources. Importantly for his religious respondents, White determined that since the cause of the ecological crisis was so clearly religious, the solution must be also. International groups are starting to agree that environmental issues cannot be solved without religious intervention. In collaboration with the World Bank and the ARC, the WWF argued in print that,

what has often been lacking in conventional conservation approaches is the regard and respect for *all* values of an area of land or sea—including both tangible and intangible values. While cultural values are sometimes considered when creating protected areas, spiritual and religious values are seldom taken into account by conservationists, yet an understanding of these issues is often critical to successful management (2005: 39).

Saving more in-depth explorations of these ideas for later chapters, I hope here to point out only that these widely divergent groups engage with each other relatively frequently and often use similar language. This overlapping language often takes the form of religious metaphor or story, foregrounds concern for marginal peoples and the freedom to retain particular cultural lifeways, and invokes descriptions of deep biological or cosmological interconnectedness. The public discussion of "basic principles" by United Nations' Secretary-General (since 2006) Ban Ki-moon provides a good example. Among these principles are "justice, conscience, and most important, consciousness. Consciousness of the community of humanity and all living things, and consciousness of our sacred duty to them" (Ki-moon 2007).<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Received in collated UNEP notes from FORE (accessed 14 October 2007).

To the extent that these high level actors of the movement express their goals as alternatives to the prevailing political and economic powers, and deploy normative language, they are fleshing out the religious dimension of sustainability.

CHAPTER 6  
THE CONTRIBUTION OF NATURAL SCIENCES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES TO THE  
RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF SUSTAINABILITY

**Introduction**

The scientists who conceived and constructed the first atomic bombs did not know until they witnessed it what shape the explosion would take. The detonation of an atom of u-237 manifested in a simulacrum of a life form: a tall, straight mushroom. Mushrooms typically grow out of dead and decaying matter, given life through the death of another (or tens of thousands of others). Another irony accompanied the splitting of the atom: Perceptions of a deep interconnectedness with nature reported by many bomb scientists while laboring on one of the most potentially destructive tools ever devised derived primarily from profound experiences in nature.

Physicists and life scientists of various types, inspired by their professional work, have contributed to sustainability movements normative ideas related to recognizing a biological or cosmological interdependence. Such perceptions and beliefs are typically communicated to others with language drawn from science, but stretched beyond its accepted scientific usage. The suggestion that the cosmos is “evolving,” for example, is an application of a biological term to a particular (and in some cases normative) depiction of astrophysical spacetime. Such affectively-oriented language gleaned from scientists has been deployed within the sustainability milieu by many people to describe the central themes of sustainability discourse: interconnectedness, awareness of limits and interpersonal empathy. While biophilic affinities (those couched in language derived from the life sciences and directed at biological entities) extend to the carbon-

based world, some scientists imagine human well-being against the backdrop of a larger cosmological narrative and advocate for “cosmophilic” affinities.<sup>147</sup>

At least within the Western scientific tradition, the first seeds for these blossoming affinities were planted around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as several physicists (such as Ernest Rutherford and Max Planck) conducted experiments that opened the door to a new sort of physical science that would later come to be known as quantum mechanics. In 1935 Albert Einstein, Boris Podolsky and Nathan Rosen published a three-page article in *Physical Review* (now commonly referred to as the EPR paper) on a thought-experiment designed to test whether the new quantum mechanical picture of reality could be considered complete.<sup>148</sup> Their experiment helped to usher in two research programs that are relevant to the idea of sustainability. First, it helped to set the stage for early work on atomic fission, and thus, the first atomic bombs. Second, the notion of “quantum entanglement,” the focus of this experiment, blossomed into an interpretive metaphor that exhibited elective affinity for other holistic interpretive frames such as systems science (Lazlo 2001: 175-179), the Gaia hypothesis (Capra 2002: 6, 29), and later narratives such as Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme’s “Universe Story” (Swimme and Berry 1994).

The affinities for deep relationality found among physicists have parallels in the life sciences. Certainly the roots of ideas related to biodiversity are present in the writings of Charles

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<sup>147</sup> This affinity often manifests in a “kinship ethic,” or an affectively oriented “fellow-feeling.” There many way to characterize such interdependence and emotional attachment to other life.

<sup>148</sup> They discovered that two particles, having once interacted, continued to display instantaneous correlated behavior even when separated by such a distance that they could not be causally related according to relativity theory. For the experimental “singlet” state, the statistical predictions of quantum mechanics were incompatible with separable predetermination. Either the particles were exchanging information faster than the speed of light, or the quantum mechanical explanation must be considered incomplete. EPR assumed relativity theory was correct, and that what Einstein called “spooky action at a distance” was illogical, thus concluding that the quantum mechanical description of reality was *not* complete. As EPR put it, “No reasonable definition of reality could be expected to permit this [the correlation of two distant particles without direct causal relationship]” (Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen 1983 [1935]: 141).

Darwin (Taylor 2009: 30-31), Gilbert White (Worster 1977: 3-14), John Burroughs (Worster 1977: 14-23; Taylor 2009: 69-71) and other life scientists who experienced a sense of awe and wonder when confronted with the objects of their study. In addition, non-scientists such as John Muir, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau had voiced such ideas before the turn of the twentieth century (see Taylor 2009, Chapter 3 for a detailed analysis). The primary contribution of Edward O. Wilson and other conservation biologists in the twentieth century was the generation of memorable terms such as *biodiversity* and *biophilia* for use in the fight for conservation and the discourse of sustainability (Wilson 1984).

These manufactured terms were also predated by holistic interpretations of the physical sciences that endorsed an evolutionary perspective on the emergence of morality but placed it within a larger, cosmological story. Several physicists and concepts from various subfields of physics have proved influential in the ways that people conceive of sustainability and its on-the-ground implementation, though these influential tributaries are not as frequently highlighted as the contributions of life sciences.

Through a study of certain ideas from the life sciences and the physical sciences that have influenced the idea of sustainability, namely the idea that ecosystems, the planet itself, or even the cosmos are deeply interconnected and “organismic” entities, I have found that sustainability advocates often deploy scientific concepts, language and metaphors strategically to advance their arguments and to “market” them to others. In such cases these scientific narratives are performing religious work. Although science is generally conceived (at least in the industrialized West) as the central pillar around which secular society structures its moral imagination, the cosmologies and implicit ethical imperatives presented in sustainability-related

sciences<sup>149</sup> at least run parallel to, and in many cases “intertwingle” with more explicitly religious interpretations of such phenomena.<sup>150</sup>

Sustainability is deployed in many different ways in the public sphere by different constituencies, and they all use science or pseudo-science to buttress their own conceptions of sustainability. As rhetorical analysts Killingsworth and Palmer noted, “the connection between science and the environmental reform movements—a match directly encouraged by authors like Thomas Berry and implied in the perspective of deep ecology—has become the most problematical and the most important link in the evolution of environmental politics in America” (Killingsworth and Palmer 1991: 48).<sup>151</sup> It is my task here to dig into how scientific ideas and data are gathered by scientists, displayed for the public eye, digested and politicized in the democratic arena, and then re-deployed in the context of sustainability.

### **The Search for a “Bridging Science”**

In his introduction to the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* Bron Taylor argued that a growing number of scientists...share a central, common denominator belief in...the sacrality of the evolutionary processes that produce biological diversity. Participants in such scientific professions often view their work as a spiritual practice. Some of these have been influenced by those who, like the religion scholar Thomas Berry, believe that science-grounded cosmological and evolutionary narratives should be understood as sacred

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<sup>149</sup> By sustainability-related sciences I refer generally to a number particular interpretations of phenomena observed within the life and physical sciences that inform, whether explicitly or implicitly, various efforts toward sustainability. The most obvious examples are certain interpretations of ecology, systems science, and what many have called the “new physics.”

<sup>150</sup> Paul Hawken forged the term “intertwining” to describe the complex intellectual cross-fertilization of different groups within civil society whose means and goals are different (2007: 5). Perhaps most interestingly, these groups exchange ideas rather freely across political and cultural boundaries. Hawken invented this term, but work tracing the free exchange of ideas and metaphors across subcultures has a long history (see discussion in chapter three, pp. 24-26). I use Hawken’s term because Hawken is a participant in what might be termed a sustainability milieu, the focus of my interest here.

<sup>151</sup> It is perhaps telling that Killingsworth and Palmer use the term “evolution” to describe the development of environmental politics, for they certainly do not use the term in the sense that most biologists would. Their uncritical use of a scientific term to describe social phenomena is illustrative of the pervasive use of scientific language, metaphor and imagery to convey ideas central to issues related to the environment and sustainability.

narratives, and that so understood, they will promote reverence-for-life ethics (2005: xvii-xviii).

Twentieth-century scientists such as Aldo Leopold (Meine 2005), Rachel Carson (Sideris and Dean Moore 2008; Taylor 2009), E.O. Wilson (Wilson 2006, 1998), and Stephen Kellert (Kellert and Wilson 1993, Kellert and Farnham 2002) have all contributed to ideas about how humans can sustainably interact with the ecological matrix upon which they depend, and to the cache of religious metaphors available for advocacy. Scientists such as James Lovelock added leavening to the metanarrative of sustainability with his now well-known Gaia hypothesis (1979). According to Lovelock, the earth could be imagined as a self-regulating super-organism. Much to his surprise, Gaia theory became standard fare among many of the aforementioned New Age and Neopagan communities searching for new metaphors to guide their search for human meaning (Monaghan 2005), and also appears as a heuristic category for examining nature religion in Taylor's forthcoming book on "Dark Green" religion (Taylor 2009).

Killingsworth and Palmer's investigation of scientific discourse offered a continuum of perspectives on how humans value nature: from "Nature as Object" (on one extreme) to "Nature as Spirit" (the other extreme). The novel twist came with their suggestion that the continuum is in the process of bending into a horseshoe, the ends moving gradually toward each other as contemporary science evolves in a direction that fosters the emergence of "holistic ecology," a *bridging science* that is capable of integrating these two former extremes (see Figure 6-1, italics mine). Of course, those on the upper portion of the "horseshoe" are often reticent to cede authority to what Killingsworth and Palmer referred to as deep and social ecologists.<sup>152</sup> But the

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<sup>152</sup> The authors do not define "deep" and "social" ecology, and it should be noted that they use them more casually than would many who study such movements. The authors use social ecology broadly to refer to those who perceive a close relationship between social injustice and ecological degradation. Others use it more specifically to refer to a political philosophy advanced primarily by Murray Bookchin. The authors use deep ecology to refer to biocentric or ecocentric environmental stances, not to refer specifically to the philosophical system developed by Arne Naess, or its intellectual offspring.

authors were hopeful that such resistance might be overcome by greater acceptance of a “bridging science.” Their discussion of possibilities for such a science included “Nascent theories...such as the Gaia hypothesis...and holistic versions of general systems theory,” which they lamented were still “consigned to the margins of the accepted canon of knowledge” (1992: 16).

Over 15 years have passed since Killingsworth and Palmer’s work, and the Gaia hypothesis remains a controversial theory. Its premises, however, have certainly been woven into mainstream venues, such as the invocation of “Mother Earth” tropes in international political venues for the UN (see Hart 2005; Taylor 2004) and the personification of the earth’s systems in many climate change discussions (Monaghan 2005). The ability of such ideas to slide between “mainstream” and “non-mainstream” science and public awareness is an illustration of how the sustainability milieu functions as a marketplace for concepts and practice. The medium of exchange often takes the form of a naturalism that resonates with traditional science, and posits an “earthen consciousness” that intuitively appeals to deep ecologists and their intellectual kin. The expanded consciousness often associated with deep ecology was directly influenced by religious teachings (Henning 2002; Weber 1999, Jacobsen 2005) and similar concepts have also been championed scholars who offer naturalistic “religions of nature” (see for example Crosby 2002).

The Gaia hypothesis has remained on the margins of interpretive scientific research, but systems science has enjoyed immense success in the scientific and political realms.<sup>153</sup> The interdisciplinary work *Panarchy* (Gunderson, Lance and C.S.Holling 2002), for example, and the increasing prevalence of adaptive management in resource management circles signals the

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<sup>153</sup> Lovelock actually considers his Gaia hypothesis a metaphor that helps to “market” the concepts that inhere to systems science to a broader audience (see for example Lovelock 2005: 683-685).

widespread acceptance and advocacy of systems science. In practice, it is often difficult to overcome the political and bureaucratic obstacles that impede quality adaptive management schemes, but such ideas are becoming more widespread in on-the-ground scientific restoration and conservation.<sup>154</sup>

While Killingsworth and Palmer hoped that the Gaia hypothesis or a holistic form of ecology might eventually tie off the horseshoe, there is one set of social movements where systems science, the Gaia hypothesis, adaptive management, hierarchy theory, and holistic language repeatedly bubble up (sometimes tethered together, sometimes not): sustainability movements. The subtitle of Norton's book *Sustainability is A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management* (2005). As noted in the more extensive explanation of his schematic definition of sustainability above, Norton combined adaptive management and hierarchy theory to provide a model for what he hoped would manifest in a more democratic and politically effective public sphere. Norton proposed an adaptive set of ecosystem management techniques, supported by a "multidirectional, iterative dialog" that generates partial, and thus constantly evolving, solutions to problems (Norton 2005: 138). To be successful, however, some common vocabularies for negotiation are necessary (2005: 130). One of the common languages that Norton missed, however, was the religious language deployed not only by scientists who promote recognition of limits and sustainable lifeways but by practitioners and members of the general public involved in sustainability advocacy.

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<sup>154</sup> Joanna Macy, for example, was one scholar who intentionally combined general systems science with religious belief and practice, specifically Theravada Buddhism, to analyze a different sort of approach to "development" (1991). On-the-ground practitioners are also aware of systems theory. For example, it makes frequent appearances in the literature related to the Northwest Earth Institute discussion groups (see chapter six for more details).

## **From Biodiversity to Biophilia**

One of the specific terms used across disciplines and constituencies in contemporary sustainability discourse is “biodiversity.” Biodiversity is, like sustainability and religion, a malleable and emotively charged term, one deployed for particular purposes (Takacs 1996). The term was coined and developed by conservation biologists, and thus contains some of the normative flavor of that professional field. But its use has flourished beyond its early confines.

### **The idea of biodiversity**

Conservation biology, as a field of academic study, emerged in the mid-1980s as a synthetic discipline aimed at integrating biological science and social and political advocacy—an explicitly normative science (Norton 1986, 2003).<sup>155</sup> Biologist Michael Soulè founded the Society for Conservation Biology in 1986 and shortly thereafter launched the journal *Conservation Biology*, moving the field toward the mainstream. However, it is interesting to note that the first two editors of the journal had ties to radical environmental groups and sympathies with the philosophy of deep ecology, both of which have affinities for nature religions (Taylor 2005). Soulè also developed a close relationship with Arne Naess, the philosophical father of deep ecology, and has openly stated that his profession is related to his Buddhist meditative practice.<sup>156</sup>

Conservation biologists have been the primary champions of the use of the term biodiversity since its popularization. And while many (perhaps most) conservation biologists would not be comfortable discussing the spiritual implications of deep ecology, these religious

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<sup>155</sup> Conservation biologists generally advocate holistic landscape planning schemes with the aim of restoring or reinvigorating ecosystem diversity, and part of their aim is to point up instances where human activities hamper, or halt the ability to achieve those goals.

<sup>156</sup> Information about the foundation of the Society for Conservation Biology, the affiliated journal, and Soule’s Buddhist practice comes from a series of talks at the University of Florida in Autumn of 2004.

ideas influenced some of the most important people in the field. If conservation biology was developed with the help of several who had affinities with countercultural movements and nature-based spiritualities, the term biodiversity itself was in large part developed by those in the scientific mainstream.

David Takacs's *The Idea of Biodiversity* (1996) traced the idea back to scientists such as Aldo Leopold, Charles Elton, and Rachel Carson. While they did not use the term biodiversity, they employed similar concepts such as “natural variety, flora and fauna, wildlife, fellow creatures, wilderness, or simply nature” (Takacs 1996: 11). Norman Myers, and Paul and Anne Ehrlich, who published books detailing the quickening of species loss, all believed that these disappearing species possessed intrinsic value, and the Ehrlichs suggested that their argument for preserving biological diversity was at bottom a religious one (Takacs 1996: 35). The first popular appearance of the shortened term “biodiversity” probably came in 1986, at the National Forum on BioDiversity, sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>157</sup> From the beginning, biodiversity was envisioned by the organizing biologists as a tactical term designed to influence governmental and public perception of the loss of species and habitats. Participant Dan Janzen stated that the Forum “was an explicit political event...designed to make Congress aware of this complexity of species we’re losing. And the word [biodiversity] was coined... [and] punched into that system at that point deliberately” (Takacs 1996: 37).

In short, conservation biologists’ promotion of biodiversity was a way to market the idea of ecological limits (or carrying capacity) in a way that was explicitly normative. As Takacs put it:

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<sup>157</sup> Given the normative character of the term biodiversity, Takacs noted that “it is ironic...that the term *biodiversity* and the politics it has engendered sprang from this august and cloistered institution [the NAS]” (1996: 36).

Battles over biological resources rage...in every remote corner of the Earth. These battles...set at odds the perceived needs of humans and those of many millions of other species, and of the natural processes that nourish them and us. Scientists who love the natural world forged the term *biodiversity* as a weapon to be wielded in these battles (Takacs 1996: 3).

For many, biodiversity is the defining feature of sustainability, and the other dimensions (the economic and social) are subsumed under the quest to maintain biodiversity (see Lovejoy in Patten 2000).<sup>158</sup> In many cases biodiversity discourse is blended with themes of deep interdependence and a generic form of nature reverence. Tim O’Riordan, for example, used highly emotive and I would argue religious language in describing the importance of biodiversity: “The future of biodiversity signifies the future of humankind...By being cognizant, and by being morally alive, humanity can save its own body and soul” (O’Riordan 2002: 13). As Takacs noted in his book, this language is not so unusual. Later in the same work O’Riordan returned to the theme of deep relationality: “Not to protect biodiversity means not to protect humanity from its communion with the planet. As we lose biodiversity, so we lose our individual and collective souls. To use biodiversity as a barometer for our ethos, and as waymarks for our pathways towards sustainability, is our best course” (O’Riordan 2002: 26).

### **The love of diversity**

In the latter half of the twentieth century scientists’ growing realization that both the resilience of ecosystems and the historical evolution of *Homo sapiens* depended on biologically rich habitats understandably led to feelings of awe and reverence for the world’s complexity. The spiritualized language increasingly used by scientists to describe the reasons individuals and governments ought to care for biological diversity indicated the maturation of the idea of biodiversity toward an affectively-oriented affinity for living things. In 1984 Edward O. Wilson

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<sup>158</sup> Patten’s book includes contributions from many well-known scientists such as Thomas Lovejoy, Vandana Shiva, and political personalities such as Gro Brundtland and HRH Prince Philip.

spawned a research program that explained, in terms of biological and genetic mechanisms, the reasons that biodiversity might be imagined as somehow related to human “souls.” Wilson popularized *biophilia*, the idea that living organisms possess a genetically-based affinity for other living things, which he believed should evoke a deep awe and concomitant respect for nature, and a new foundation for ethics based on the adaptive advantages of ecosystem preservation (Wilson 1984).<sup>159</sup> The project was driven, ultimately, by the recognition of species disappearance, but Wilson was suggesting that there was a deeper reason to care about the disappearance of all species, not just the charismatic ones. Quoting Aldo Leopold’s “land ethic” as the foundation for a respectful ethical approach to nature, Wilson’s collaborator Stephen Kellert stated plainly that “Biological diversity and the ecological processes that make it possible are the crucibles in which our species’ physical, mental, and spiritual being have been forged” (Kellert 1993: 26). Kellert continued, “mitigation of this environmental crisis may necessitate nothing less than a fundamental shift in human consciousness” (Kellert 1993: 26).

This shift in consciousness (what Leopold might have called the development of an ecological “conscience” [Leopold 1949: 207-210]) was characterized most lucidly by Scott McVay in the “Prelude” to Kellert and Wilson’s *The Biophilia Hypothesis* (1993). Alluding to Melville’s masterpiece *Moby Dick*, McVay recalled a scene where the protagonist Ishmael is tethered to one of his mates as the man removed the precious blubber from a kill.<sup>160</sup> Ishmael pondered the implications of the rope between them, and realized that this mate’s fate would be his own: “this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes...he [*sic*],

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<sup>159</sup> Stephen Kellert defined biophilia as “The idea that people possess a genetic inclination, grounded in the quest for individual and collective fitness, to attach physical, emotional, intellectual, and moral meaning to nature” (2005: 185).

<sup>160</sup> *Moby Dick* is a saga of a whaling vessel. Removing the blubber from a kill could be dangerous, one of the reasons shipmates were tied together.

one way or other, has this *Siamese connexion* (sic) with a plurality of other mortals” (McVay 1993: 5, italics in original).

McVay, also a scientist, related several instances of what might be called biophilic “conversion” moments where people are quite suddenly struck by the “humanness” of other animals, a sudden realization that the emotional lives of animals are every bit as rich as ours.<sup>161</sup> For example, he recalled a bright acquaintance who remained extremely skeptical of reports about drowning swimmers being rescued by porpoises. One day McVay met her skepticism with an offer to accompany him to his lab, which contained a tidal pool and a female porpoise. McVay’s acquaintance agreed, and once there entered the water and assumed “the dead man’s float.” McVay’s retelling of the incident is worth quoting:

From behind, the porpoise swam onto the woman’s back and clasped its flippers firmly under her arms and began to propel her around the pool with powerful tail flukes. At first she resisted. She was unused to letting go or losing control. She noticed, however, that she could see and breathe. The weight and vertical stroking of the flukes lifted her head clear of the water as the two—joined by a belly-to-back Siamese connexion—made a circuit of the pool to the gasps of the onlookers. She “let go.” She told me she relaxed as deeply and as fully as she ever had. The porpoise made two complete circuits of the pool and then shot straight up in the air, releasing the woman gently and precisely on her knees on the cement lip of the pool. She said softly, “I understand” (McVay 1993: 7).

An edited volume by Stephen Kellert and Timothy Farnham (2002) further explored the spiritual aspects of biophilia, with biologists, ecologists, and religious scholars weighing in on how biophilia can give rise to an ethics of kinship. Their preface stated that “we see our own salvation in the preservation of the health, integrity, and beauty of creation” (2002: xiv). According to Farnham and Kellert, an ethic of right relationship with the nonhuman world, the recognition of human interdependence with other creatures, and the cultivation of sustainable lifeways can only come by building bridges between science and religion. Biodiversity

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<sup>161</sup> For a book length treatment of the emotional lives of animals, see Mark Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals* (2007).

recognizes the richness of life, while biophilia advocates for an affective bond with the interdependent web of life. The idea that humans can and should have affinity for other living organisms is central to many sustainability movements.<sup>162</sup>

The idea and putative importance of biological diversity (if not the more affectively-grounded biophilia) made its way into the Brundtland report, the most well-known work elucidating the idea of sustainable development. The retention of “biological diversity” and “genetic” diversity are both referred to as crucial for achieving sustainable development for a variety of reasons, including potential contributions to human welfare, ecosystem services (WCED 1987: 147-148), and the “ethical cultural, aesthetic, and purely scientific reasons for conserving wild beings” (WCED 1987: 13). The Commission concluded Chapter 6 on “Species and Ecosystems” with the admonition that “Our failure to [save species and their ecosystems] will not be forgiven by future generations” (WCED 1987: 166). It is worth noting the close parallel with E.O. Wilson’s claim in *Biophilia* that “the one process now going on that will take millions of years to correct is the loss of genetic and species diversity by the destruction of natural habitats. This is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us” (Wilson 1984, quoted in McVay 1993: 4).

These themes of interconnectedness and interpersonal relationship, couched in loosely religious language and grounded in scientific evolutionary narratives, are common among life scientists engaged in sustainability discourse. Biophilia grants an additional layer of affective power to the already rich idea of biodiversity. For Wilson, Kellert and others the innate, evolved

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<sup>162</sup> For example, as I wrote this, I received an “e-newsletter” from the University of Florida’s Office of Sustainability, and at the bottom of the newsletter was this quote from J.J. Rousseau: “It is in man's heart that the life of nature's spectacle exists; to see it, one must feel it.”

human affinity for other life is ample material for the construction of a strong environmental ethic.

### **From Biophilia to Cosmophilia**

The idea of biophilic affinity predated and influenced the development of sustainability discourse, manifesting in the writings of both scientists (Darwin, White, Burroughs) and non-scientists (such as Muir, Emerson, Thoreau, and others). But by the middle of the twentieth century physicists were also frankly articulating awe and reverence inspired by their work, and were thus contributing to the still nascent myth of sustainability.

### **Awe, reverence and the path to destruction**

Killingsworth and Palmer argued that the completion of the atomic bomb was the crowning moment for the “Nature as Object” end of the value continuum (see discussion above; specifically the science, government, and industry perspectives). “Their [science, government, and industry’s] greatest glory,” the authors stated, “came in alliance with one another, potently symbolized in the Manhattan Project and the continued development of the scientific-military-industrial complex after World War II” (1991: 15). But these successes were facilitated by men whose motives were not so much military as human. Environmental historian Mark Fiege connected bomb scientists’ experiences with nature, which in many cases moved them to pursue science as a profession, to those of some of the life scientists discussed above: “the experiences of children such as Oppenheimer, Meitner, and Rabi [all Manhattan Project scientists] mirrored events in Rachel Carson’s girlhood” (Fiege 2007: 585). Later, Fiege compared Carson’s upbringing to that of noted physicist and public intellectual Richard Feynman: “Nature study with loving parents, wonder experienced in local landscapes, scientific careers, the championing of unmediated contact between children and the physical world: Carson and Feynman shared much” (587).

Fiege noted that many of these scientists' best ideas materialized, or were vetted on long walks in natural settings. J. Robert Oppenheimer (the Project director) maintained a ranch in the mountains of New Mexico, and many of the European scientists working on the project were mountaineers.<sup>163</sup> Fiege argued that "Physicists, chemists, and mathematicians studied atoms out of profound curiosity, and when they detected the inner workings of the tiny particles, they experienced awe, amazement, delight, and transcendence" (2007: 581).

Of course, such awe and reverence did not prevent them from building a large bomb. But Fiege, comparing Oppenheimer to Leopold this time, argued that when Oppenheimer realized the destructive capacity of the bomb, and

stated his conviction that humanity's only hope lay in the binding obligations of the world community, he was closer to Leopold than either of them could have known. Oppenheimer and other atomic scientists could find inspiration in a mountain. But somewhere on a lonely, windswept, vertiginous slope, they also learned, in their own way, to think like one (2007: 602).<sup>164</sup>

Like the first views of the earth from space, the detonation of the first atomic bombs brought a deeper level of consciousness to the global community. It was abundantly clear for the first time in recorded history that *Homo faber* had manufactured a tool that could cause its own extinction. The sustainability of the species was for the first time questioned by large portions of the global population. Some early invocations of ideas related to global sustainability were vetted in international commissions such as the Palme Commission (1982), which was explicitly dedicated to addressing the threat of thermonuclear war (Wiseman 2005).

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<sup>163</sup> While the bomb was being tested, Oppenheimer, speaking with another project scientist, supposedly gazed at the Sierra Oscura range in the background and muttered, "Funny how the mountains always inspire our work" (Fiege 2007: 579).

<sup>164</sup> This quote refers to a well-known chapter of Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* titled "Thinking Like a Mountain" (1949: 129-133). There, Leopold discussed his belief that "fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean a hunter's paradise" (130). On one occasion, however, Leopold shot a she-wolf and watched as a "fierce green fire" died in her eyes. This mysterious fire represented "something new" to Leopold, "something known only to her and the mountain" (130). Leopold sensed that his opinion of wolves was not shared by the mountain, and it is this "conversion" moment that is often referred to as a paradigmatic example of an ecocentric ethics.

## **A web of hidden connections**

If the manufacture of the atomic bomb facilitated the integration of scientific, governmental and industrial sectors, its detonation acted as an alarm, alerting the global community to the possibility of its own destruction. There were several cultural responses, and some of them focused on positive steps that could be made in the wake of nuclear despair. Greenpeace, inspired by Quaker conceptions of nonviolence, was birthed by nuclear insecurity and concern over ecological degradation (Hunter 1979; Hawken 2007: 196; see also Wapner 1996). Other activists, such as Joanna Macy, began their activist careers envisioning positive responses to fears about nuclear wars and winters. In the late 1970s Macy began conducting what she called “Despair and Empowerment Workshops” designed to help people cope with and vent the emotional strain caused by the escalating Cold War arms race (see Macy 1983).<sup>165</sup>

In the late 1980s, as the Cold War waned, many peace and nuclear disarmament activists turned their energies toward the increasingly dire predictions of environmental degradation. Macy, along with environmental activist John Seed, created explicitly environmental rituals such as their “Councils of All Beings,” where participants meditated on the non-human creatures around them, identified with them, and spoke for them in a healing circle where all beings (especially those with no political voice) were recognized and heard (Seed, Macy, Fleming and Naess 1988).<sup>166</sup> Seed’s now famous metaphor that “I am the rainforest, recently come into consciousness, defending myself” suggested that his direct action in defense of the rainforest was

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<sup>165</sup> Macy was an activist working with Tibetan refugees when she was exposed to Buddhism. After obtaining a doctorate by exploring the resonances between general systems theory and Buddhism (Macy 1991), she worked for the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement, a movement for sustainable communities in Sri Lanka (see Strobel 2005 for more details). She has been influential on Buddhist environmentalism, environmental ethics, and deep ecological thought and practice, and has thus contributed to ideas related to sustainability.

<sup>166</sup> Much of this background was discussed during lectures at the University of Florida by Heart Phoenix, longtime radical environmental activist (Spring 2005), and John Seed (Spring 2007). For a more detailed description see Taylor (2001: 229).

in fact *self-defense* (Seed 1983; Seed 2000).<sup>167</sup> Bryan Norton told me that Seed's idea was probably the single most helpful notion to come from deep ecology, and was an important corrective to science's tendency to project environmental problems and solutions as somehow "out there" rather than intimately intertwined with the choices people make individually and culturally (interview 3 January 2008).

It was in this rich cultural loam of the late 1970s and 1980s that the ideas birthed in quantum mechanics over a half century earlier began to exert influence in environmental circles. Many of those who brought such ideas from science to the sustainability milieu, such as physicists David Bohm and Fritjof Capra, characterized them in spiritual terms, using metaphors of deep interconnectivity.

Two of the fathers of quantum theory, Niels Bohr and David Bohm, had a longstanding disagreement regarding how to interpret quantum mechanical mathematical formalism.<sup>168</sup> Bohr wished to emphasize that there was an inherent *ontological* uncertainty implied by the mathematical formalism of quantum mechanics. That is, there was genuine causal indeterminacy at the quantum level. Einstein, and later Bohm, contended that the uncertainty Bohr noted was really an *epistemological* uncertainty—though the physicists' tools were not yet sensitive enough to "see" them, there must be one or more "hidden variables" working to produce the results that

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<sup>167</sup> Seed's observation was stimulated by participation in a direct action to stop logging in a rain forest. He talked about this experience at lectures given at the University of Florida in Spring of 2005. In print, Seed described his meditative technique: "[I] lie down in the forest...cover myself in leaves, and imagine an umbilical cord reaching down into the earth. Then I visualize myself as being one leaf on the tree of life, both as myself personally and as a human being, and I realize that the sap of that tree runs through every leaf including me, whether I'm aware of it or not" (Seed 2000: 288-289).

<sup>168</sup> Bohr and later Bohm both insisted, contra EPR (discussed above), that the quantum mechanical picture of reality *was* complete, and that EPR's mistake lay in relying on traditional conceptions of physical reality (see Bohr 1983 [1935]: 146).

appeared to be underdetermined.<sup>169</sup> One popular way to account for these hidden variables was to recall the idea of entanglement, where the “hidden explanatory factor” was imagined to be the radical inseparability of physical reality: a “wholism” whose recognition, it was often anticipated, could spark a new sort of moral imagination in humans.<sup>170</sup> By the late 1970s Bohm had published with well-known theologians John Cobb and David Ray Griffin discussing the theological implications of such wholism (Cobb and Griffin 1977; Griffin 1988).<sup>171</sup>

Other physicists were writing about the implications of what they were calling the “new physics,” and in print combining physical descriptions of reality with religious and/or mystical traditions. Fritjof Capra, for example, in the foreword to *The Tao of Physics* (Capra 1984 [1975]) argued that the lopsided scientific imagination of the West was giving way to a crisis of “social, ecological, moral and spiritual dimensions” (Capra, xvi).<sup>172</sup> Like many others, he traced his understanding of systemic holism to profound experiences in nature and experimentation with entheogens.<sup>173</sup> During one of his entheogen-fueled experiences, Capra reported that he “suddenly became aware of my whole environment as being engaged in a gigantic cosmic

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<sup>169</sup> Einstein, as discussed above, believed this signaled that quantum mechanics was an incomplete theory. Bohm recognized that an epistemological uncertainty could in theory be overcome with more powerful tools or logic, and suggested new interpretations of quantum mechanics that considered it to be a complete theory. There are many interpretations of quantum mechanical phenomena that can fit the data. For example, Hugh Everett proposed a “many-worlds” interpretation of quantum mechanics which was understood to suggest multiple parallel universes (Everett 1957).

<sup>170</sup> I spell “wholism” with a “w” here to follow Bohm, though elsewhere I use the more conventional spelling.

<sup>171</sup> The volume edited by Griffin, titled *The Reenchantment of Nature* (1988), included contributions by life scientists Charles Birch (with whom Cobb published an influential volume called *Liberation of Life* [1981]), Rupert Sheldrake, and physicists Bohm and Brian Swimme.

<sup>172</sup> Capra stated that Western culture was lopsided because it had been preoccupied with the “yang,” or masculine energy. He believed “the rising concern with ecology, the strong interest in mysticism, the growing feminist awareness, and the rediscovery of holistic approaches to health and healing are all manifestations of the same evolutionary trends” (1984 [1976]: xvi).

<sup>173</sup> According to Chas Clifton, “entheogens’ is a term that refers to drugs which provoke ecstasy and have traditionally been used as shamanic or religious inebriants....The term’s Greek roots translate as ‘god generated within’” (Clifton 2005: 596). Capra stated that “in the beginning, I was helped on my way by ‘power plants’ which showed me how...spiritual insights come on their own...emerging from the depth of consciousness...it was so

dance” (1976: xix). Capra elaborated: “I ‘saw’ the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy; I felt its rhythm and ‘heard’ its sound” (xix).

Bohm agreed with Capra that “fragmentation” of thought prevented humans from having a coherent world view, and suggested that “a proper world view, appropriate for its time, is generally one of the basic factors that is essential for harmony in the individual and in society as a whole” (Bohm 2002 [1980]: xiii). For Bohm, a proper worldview was wholistic: “relativity and quantum theory agree, in that they both imply the need to look on the world as an *undivided whole*, in which all parts of the universe, including the observer and his instruments, merge and unite in one totality” (Bohm 2002 [1980]: 13, italics in the original).

What makes Capra and Bohm interesting is that they not only interpreted quantum mechanics ontologically (that is, as suggesting that the world *really is* an interconnected, unified whole), but also normatively. While both of them are physicists, they subsume their understanding of physics into a larger interpretive framework that includes biological, cognitive, social and religious dimensions.

Capra later noted in *The Hidden Connections: Integrating the Biological, Cognitive, and Social Dimensions of Life Into a Science of Sustainability* that he realized in the 1980s that the “new physics” was not an ideal “paradigm and source of metaphors” for the conceptual shifts that had manifested throughout the physical and life sciences, and in a series of social movements since the 1960s (2002: xvi). Instead, in this book, Capra used “sustainability” and “systems science” as the guiding paradigms, for these terms better captured the thrust of these associated cultural movements. Capra, then, was using *sustainability* for a strategic purpose,

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overwhelming that I burst into tears, at the same time, not unlike Castaneda, pouring out my impressions on to a piece of paper” (1984 [1976]: xx).

deploying the term in publication because he believed it to have greater descriptive power and public impact.

Scientific discourse acts in two ways in the construction of the myth of sustainability. First, it offers empirical evidence about the ways the world works. Second, it points to potentially adaptive ways of gaining knowledge, speaking about that knowledge, and arranging social interactions around that knowledge. Moreover, in the instances discussed above (which only hint at the depth and richness of such discussions), spiritual ideas and ideals are used both to interpret physical reality, and to translate these interpretations to others. The two ideas that most commonly emerge from holistic interpretations of science are the foundational interconnectedness of the living world and the cosmos, and the notion that a new “paradigm,” or new “consciousness” of human affinity for the unfolding universe, “a cosmophilia” is emerging.

### **Science and the Myth of Sustainability**

Biodiversity, biophilia, and invocations of what I have here called cosmophilia evoke a reverence for cosmological unfolding and have been influential within sustainability discourse. But it is questionable whether most of the citizenry would, at least in the United States, be able to easily define biodiversity or sustainability, or consider quantum mechanics to be in any way morally instructive. Whether or not these terms motivate public awareness and activism, the idea that humans have a deep and affectively-oriented affinity for living things, a biophilia, and possibly the entire cosmos, a cosmophilia, still pepper academic scholarship, the popular realm and the policy arena. Just as oppositional or environmental subcultures exchange ideas and metaphors rather freely, within the sustainability milieu ideas such as biophilia and cosmophilia may arise independently (within the life sciences and physical sciences, respectively) but be exchanged across the boundaries of these disciplines with ease. Moreover, such ideas exert

influence on popular culture, as well as other academic disciplines relevant to sustainability, such as environmental ethics.

For example, environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott (1985) attempted to tag quantum mechanics as a source for environmental ethics. His primary goal was to solve what he called the “most recalcitrant problem for environmental ethics,” the creation of a coherent theory of the intrinsic value of nonhuman nature (1985: 257). Drawing on Capra and Paul Shepard (a human ecologist influential in the deep ecology movement), Callicott argued that “If quantum theory and ecology both imply in structurally similar ways in both the physical and organic domains of nature the continuity of self and nature, and if the self is intrinsically valuable, then nature is intrinsically valuable” (275).<sup>174</sup> Note here the parallel between Callicott’s philosophical position and the credo popularized by John Seed (discussed above) that he *is* the rainforest defending itself.<sup>175</sup>

Although Seed is not an academic, the others mentioned above are, so I should be clear that these concepts do not belong only to academics (whether of the scientific or philosophical variety). Ideas about ecological and cosmological interdependence and heightened human consciousness have also been circulating for some time within popular venues. For example, the popular documentary film *What the Bleep Do We Know?* (WTBDWK 2004) was billed as “Exploring the worlds of Quantum Physics, Neurology, and Molecular Biology in relation to the

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<sup>174</sup> Callicott asked the reader to assume “a) with Shepard and Capra that nature is one and continuous with the self, and b) with the bulk of modern moral theory...that self-interested behavior has a *prima facie* claim to be at the same time rational behavior.” Following this logic to its conclusion, “the central axiological problem of environmental ethics...may be directly and simply solved” (1985: 275).

<sup>175</sup> In this essay, Callicott is not defending *objective* intrinsic value (as Holmes Rolston, III often does [see Rolston III 1993 for an example related to biophilia]), but rather a *subjective* intrinsic value, where human valuers are required to encounter nature, and consider it to be valuable for its own sake. In essence, Callicott is really making two points: a) first, that quantum mechanics helps to overcome the fact-value dualism by positing emergent complementary properties; and b) that quantum theory offers a new “cosmological-metaphysical” interpretive frame that transcends traditional rationality (here I draw on Michael E. Zimmerman 1995 [1988]).

spheres of Spirituality, Metaphysics and Polish weddings.”<sup>176</sup> The film featured interviews with several mystics, neuroscientists, and religious leaders who suggested that the human mind can literally shape the world around it because it is an internally related and integral *part* of that world. An emotively-grounded interconnectedness with the cosmos is the central theme of the film. A follow up six-disk special release called *Down the Rabbit Hole*, and an ongoing series of books, study groups, and a newsletter (“The Bleeping Herald”) attest to the popular impact of such themes. Although the film did not directly advocate for sustainability, many subcultures that participate in environmental or sustainability activism exhibit resonance with the idea that humans are integrally related to the world, and that the way humans conceive of and relate to the world matters.

Some scientists promote the idea of “quantum consciousness” as portrayed in *WTBDWK* (Capra, for example), while other grassroots programs promoting sustainability perpetuate ideas drawn from life scientists such as Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, physicists such as Capra and Brian Swimme, and ideas such as Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis and Wilson and Kellert’s biophilia hypothesis.<sup>177</sup> In all of these cases, “cosmophilic” ideas are used strategically to influence the development of a wider moral imagination, one that envisions humans as integrally related to a process of cosmological evolution.

For instance, the Northwest Earth Institute (NWEI) promotes a series of “discussion groups” for communities that include publications from all of the above scientists. What began as a husband and wife team promoting sustainable lifestyle choices in the Pacific Northwest has

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<sup>176</sup> From the official website, <http://www.whatthebleep.com/index2.shtml>, accessed 23 April 2008.

<sup>177</sup> For example, Einstein, Capra, Carson, Leopold and many other ecological “heroes” are honored with pages in the Better World Project’s Earth Day coloring book. The Better World Project is dedicated to the “diverse movements for change” toward a “just and sustainable world.” For more information about Better World, see <http://www.betterworld.net>, accessed 18 June 2008.

blossomed into a grassroots movement that over several years has included over 85,000 participants. The “Discovering a Sense of Place” discussion module is advertised with a quote from deep ecologists Bill Devall and George Sessions: “The work we call cultivating ecological consciousness involves becoming aware of the actuality of rocks, wolves, trees, and rivers - the cultivation of the insight that everything is connected,” while in the “Exploring Deep Ecology” module Brian Swimme discusses the cosmological “Epic of Evolution:” “Within the evolutionary point of view, you realize—holy todelo!—the mind itself is just an expression of the powers of the universe” (NWEI 2001: iv-10). These ideas are not mere academic mantle-pieces; they have become fodder for the public imagination.

The idea of biophilia, in these cases, is too narrow: the affinities of living things are imagined to reach beyond the carbon-based world, manifesting in cosmophilia. Even when the language of sustainability advocacy is not explicitly religious, in many cases it reflects core values and deep beliefs of particular individuals, communities or groups, and when deployed in the public sphere it is performing religious work. Ideas about interconnectedness and “alternative” ethics or anthropologies have been raised and popularized by both life scientists and physical scientists, often using religious language and metaphors.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, it is usually through such religious language that these concepts are interpreted for the public. Particularly in these circles, where science is explicitly connected with sustainability, scientists tend to promote an approach to envisioning the environment that is distinctly normative. To the extent that these scientists are treading on normative territory, and are connecting their own existence and moral sensibilities not only to living things, but also to affinities with broader cosmological

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<sup>178</sup> These are envisioned as “alternatives” to the ethical demands proffered by the prevailing economic, social, and political powers.

evolutionary narratives and “forces,” a “cosmophilia,” they are contributing to the religious metanarrative of sustainability.

### **Social Sciences and Sustainability**

The social sciences have also contributed to the crucial human dimension of this emerging metanarrative of sustainability. Anthropologists and later religious scholars analyzed cultures whose lifeways were envisioned as “alternatives” to Western culture, while some economists began to propose “alternative” models of exchange. To the extent that they use language of deep relationality and interconnectedness, and promote differing social arrangements and exchange, they are doing religious work. Moreover, these models are frequently referenced by scholars and activists outside of the social sciences as important to sustainability.

### **Other Peoples’ Science and Sustainability**

Louise Fortmann, professor of sustainable development at UC Berkeley, suggested that appropriate development schemes always included input about the ways that the targets of development conceive of and classify their worlds -- what she called “other peoples’ science.”<sup>179</sup> Several scholars have attempted to “take seriously” the knowledge systems of indigenous and other marginalized peoples in an effort to generate more equitable and sustainable development (see for example Wright 1988, 2007). For example, Berkes suggested that traditional ecological knowledge was the embodiment of a lifestyle that was the product of extended residence in particular places, and could be combined with postmodern science to achieve “sustainability” (Berkes 1999: 154-155). Environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott, in his work *Earth’s Insights: A Multicultural Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (Callicott 1994), argued that “postmodern science” epitomized by the “new

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<sup>179</sup> Class lecture, Fall 2002.

physics” and the “new ecology” can create a consilience of Western and indigenous knowledges, with the result being a more productive search for sustainability. Callicott advocated a new, multiethnic environmental ethic: “an international environmental ethic firmly grounded in ecology and buttressed by the new physics will complement, rather than clash with, the environmental ethics implicit in the world’s many indigenous traditions of thought” (209-210). While Callicott’s vision, where “the contemporary custodians of traditional and indigenous non-Western systems of ideas can be cocreators of a new master narrative for the rainbow race of the global village” sounds intuitively appealing, I suspect that actual political and social structures may be needed to facilitate the construction of such large-scale narratives (Callicott 1994: 192). For example, such literature recommends a methodological pluralism and a democratization of political contact points for these plural epistemologies as a starting place. In many cases, however, the use and abuse of such language and ideas in international politics has contributed to what some anthropologists consider to be a persistent paternalism toward indigenous or otherwise marginal cultures (Wright 2009).

Traditional or neo-traditional lifeways (that is, those that are based on observation, experience, and extensive local knowledge), including the beliefs and practices that help populations to negotiate these lifeways, are neither metaphysically irrational nor merely simplistic, erroneous renderings of how the world “really works.”<sup>180</sup> According to those who extol the virtues of indigenous and traditional peoples their persistence over time illustrates the accuracy of their understanding of the embodied, situated worlds in which they participate.

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<sup>180</sup> Berkes and Folke suggest that it is not historical continuity that is most important. Experience, observation, and attentive learning from particular places are what constitute the essential ingredients in traditional or neo-traditional management (1998: 5).

Darrell Posey suggested that Western scientific management regimes are over time growing closer to older, traditional forms of management:

Many people in industrialized countries are... trying to re-integrate the concept of “sacred balance” into a practical ethic of land, biodiversity, and environment. This movement takes its inspiration from Leopold’s ideas of “land ethic” and “environmental citizenship”....Indigenous, traditional and local communities...express their profound concerns in cultural and spiritual terms precisely because they recognize its deep-rootedness (Posey 2004: 204).

Posey explicitly drew on Black Elk’s teachings, David Suzuki’s book *The Sacred Balance* (Suzuki 1997), as well as from indigenous peoples and publications from international political bodies.<sup>181</sup> This exemplifies the cross-fertilization of these varied constituencies, and the common languages used by them.

However, a note of caution should be sounded here, for these invocations of supposedly indigenous values are not always accurate, nor are they totally innocent. For example, Darrell Posey was an important supporter of the inclusion of indigenous voices in sustainable development regimes, editing a weighty volume elucidating the spiritual values of biodiversity as part of a UNEP supplement to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (Posey 1999). The veracity of Posey’s research, however, has been questioned. Anthropologist Eugene Parker, for example, whose work in the Amazon overlapped geographically with Posey’s, has argued that “Posey’s research on indigenous resource management strategies is a remarkable house of cards” (1993: 722). Posey’s claims, Parker contends, were based not just on a misunderstanding of the indigenous experience but also on his intentional disregard for repeated entreaties by the peoples

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<sup>181</sup> On Suzuki’s influence see chapter six of Taylor’s *Dark Green Religion* (2009).

themselves that Posey's explanatory categories did not make sense to the way they perceived and interacted with their habitats.<sup>182</sup>

In short, Posey was reading his own ideas about sustainable cultural behaviors into the Kayapo experience. While the use of the term sustainable to describe indigenous or traditional activities might resonate with the political engines that promote and fund sustainable development projects, these funding agencies and sometimes the scholars that support them tend to “view indigenous aims through Western lenses and rely on a few bicultural individuals as leaders” (Conklin and Graham 1995: 704; quoted in Wright 2009: 204). In such cases, anthropologists may work toward manufacturing, rather than cultivating, a sustainable society.

Traditional social-ecological systems can be helpful without this strong tendency to romanticize the beliefs and practices of cultural others. As Berkes, Folke, and Colding have argued, “adaptive management in modern society could be seen as...a sort of rediscovery of principles applied in traditional social-ecological systems. It is a search for a sustainable relationship with life-supporting ecosystems, a social and institutional response to resource scarcity and management failure” (Berkes, Folke and Colding 1998: 358). They are suggesting that some traditional social-ecological systems are instructive not because the people possessed some inherently sustainable ethic or worldview, but rather because their social structures were more sensitive to perturbations in the ecological system. This is a valuable lesson, Berkes and his collaborators believe, for re-thinking how to structure socio-political systems within the industrialized world.

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<sup>182</sup> One of Posey's primary contributions was the idea that the Kayapo had cultivated a series of “forest islands” in savannahs in and around their villages by bringing useful plants from far away. Parker stated that “I conclude that *apêtê* [forest islands], as described by Posey, do not exist” (1993: 715). Parker draws on some of the same informants that Posey cites in his own research.

Berkes, Folke and Colding sum up how natural sciences, social sciences, and values are tied together and placed within an ecological matrix, providing a nice segue into the discussion of economics as it relates to sustainability:

[J]ust as physics moved in other [less reductionistic] directions... (e.g. Capra, 1982), so too has biology (e.g. Kauffman, 1993) and economics (e.g. Anderson, Arrow and Pines, 1988)....The critiques of reductionistic biology or, for example, neoclassical economics, are now becoming dated. Those bodies of scholarship are being superseded by true innovative integration of economics and ecology (Berkes and Folke 1998: 345).

### **Exchange Relations and the Metanarrative of Sustainability**

After the tragic events of 11 September 2001, U.S. President G.W. Bush reported to a special Joint Session of Congress that “freedom itself was under attack.”<sup>183</sup> In this speech, the freedom that the U.S. represented was explicitly related to economic activity. Economic sanctions and measures were taken to cripple existing terror networks,<sup>184</sup> and Americans were encouraged to go about their business, especially with regard to their typical purchasing and consumption patterns.<sup>185</sup> In the same speech, Bush pleaded for “your [Americans’] continued participation and confidence in the American economy. Terrorists attacked a symbol of American prosperity. They did not touch its source. ...We will come together to take active steps that strengthen America’s economy, and put our people back to work.”

In Chapter 4 I highlighted other examples of economic arguments used to promote capitalism and consumption following the first two World Wars. Capitalism, in its present form,

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<sup>183</sup> Four US-owned passenger jets were hijacked, and two of the jets were flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in Manhattan, New York. The full speech is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html> (accessed 10 June 2008).

<sup>184</sup> One of Bush’s calls for aid went to “banking systems around the world” ([www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), accessed 10 June 2008).

<sup>185</sup> On 15 September 2001 Bush was asked at a press conference: “Sir, how much of a sacrifice are ordinary Americans going to have to be expected to make in their daily lives, in their daily routines?” His reply was “Our hope, of course, is that they make no sacrifice whatsoever. We would like to see life return to normal in America.” Full text available at [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov) (accessed 10 June 2008).

however, has a peculiar attribute that makes it a repeated target for sustainability advocates. Neoclassical economics always assumes some level of substitutability of resources and goods (Sumner 2005: 87).<sup>186</sup> Since at least the 1970s several scholars and activists have argued that the present form of capitalism has historically been one of the primary engines of ecological degradation and social injustice. For example, Gary Gardner of the Worldwatch Institute argued that market capitalism represents a threat to *all* world religions, and that religious attitudes are the necessary counterbalance that could prevent us from fouling our nests (Gardner 2002: 9). Economists Thomas Prugh, Robert Costanza, and Herman Daly put it more forcefully, arguing that capitalism is

fatally blind to the critical issues of the scale of the global economy and the maldistribution of the world's wealth, denies ethical obligations to community welfare, shifts all possible costs to others (including the public), seeks to co-opt the political process by means of moneyed interest groups and otherwise erodes and corrupts the public sphere, and encourages the global homogenization of culture (2000: 71).

There have typically been three sorts of economically-grounded responses to traditional neoclassical arguments that markets can generate justice and facilitate increased cultural resilience. First, some scholars have argued that the localized diversification, rather than growth in sheer size, of markets can provide similar or equivalent economic stimulus for increasing levels of human well-being (see for example Mander and Goldsmith 1996).<sup>187</sup> Second, economists such as Herman Daly, drawing on the idea that growth is not always good, have offered instead a provocative vision of a “steady-state” economy (Daly 1980, 1996). Finally, others have suggested that capitalism is skewed at least in part because it clings to GNP as a

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<sup>186</sup> Advocates of “weak sustainability,” for example, might allow the replanting of logged old growth forest with a single high-pulp species, noting similar levels of net primary productivity, and arguing that this is an appropriate substitute. Some strong sustainability advocates, on the other hand, might draw stricter boundaries on what sort of resource substitutions would be allowed. See the “introduction,” pp. 4-5 for further discussion.

<sup>187</sup> Former World Bank economist Hermann Daly refers to this diversification without increasing throughputs “development” (1996).

standard of a “successful” economy. Examples of alternatives to GNP include the standard imposed by the nation of Bhutan, which has started using the idea of “happiness” as its index for assessing the performance of the economy (Anielski 2007: 137-145).<sup>188</sup> Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen (2000 [1999]) has argued that the success of development projects ought to be measured not by the increase in production or exchange but in the degrees of freedom provided to the citizenry. These alternatives are of central importance within sustainability circles, highlighting the limits to economic activity and pathways to increased technological efficiency.<sup>189</sup>

Perhaps the most well-known use of economic logic to highlight ecological limits in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was *Limits to Growth* (Meadows, et al. 1972), a report commissioned and promoted by a group of elite scientists, businesspeople, and government agents from around the world. Partly in response to this report, the editors of the well-known journal *The Ecologist* penned their *Blueprint for Survival* that same year, reviewing ecological and social problems and providing some suggestions for moving toward a sustainable society (Goldsmith, et al. 1972: 1). They hoped to promote “a new philosophy of life” which might bring on “the dawn of a new age in which Man (*sic*) will learn to live with the rest of nature rather than against it” (vi). Their citation and assessment of one of the Bishop of Kingston’s lectures is interesting, particularly in the context of economics. In this particular speech, the Bishop<sup>190</sup> provides a new set of “commandments” about humans’ responsibility for maintaining God’s “household”.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Their official measurement is Gross National Happiness, or GNH.

<sup>189</sup> They are not always considered separately. They are sometimes discussed together as a set of solutions.

<sup>190</sup> The reader is introduced to the bishop in the reading quite suddenly, with no real explanation of who he is, or why he is important to the authors.

<sup>191</sup> The etymology of the term “economics” derives from the Greek *oikos*, and literally refers to the process and means of exchange within the “house.”

You shall not take the name of the Lord...in vain by calling on his name but ignoring his natural law.’ In other words, there must be a fusion between our religion and the rest of our culture, since there is no valid distinction between the laws of God and Nature, and Man must live by them no less than any other creature. Such a belief must be central to the philosophy of the stable society, and must permeate all our thinking. Indeed, it is the only one that is properly scientific, and science must address itself much more vigorously to the problems of cooperating with the rest of nature, rather than seeking to control it (165).

I do not believe that the journal editors intended for this remarkable passage to promote Christianity. Rather, they used religion in a broader sense to refer to core values and deep beliefs, and claim that “good” social science accounts for such values, rather than pretending to remain value-neutral. Moreover, religion has been a key element in recognizing that economies make sense only within ecological boundaries. Herman Daly has argued that “we need a new central organizing principle—a fundamental ethic that will guide our actions in a way more in harmony with both basic religious insight and the scientifically verifiable limits of the natural world. This ethic is suggested by the terms ‘sustainability,’ ‘sufficiency,’ ‘equity,’ efficiency” (1996: 218). Like the Bishop, Daly provided an “11<sup>th</sup> commandment”: “Thou shalt not allow unlimited inequality in the distribution of private property” (1996: 206).<sup>192</sup>

The economic future, at least according to many economists, does not depend on endlessly growing the economy on a global scale, and may be better served by the emergence of more localized exchange relations and technology transfers. The scholars above are talking about a “new” way of envisioning our exchange relations. Certainly economic globalization brings significant benefits in the form of health care, raised standards of living, and arguably social equality and justice. But it has also spawned emerging fundamentalisms (abroad as well as in North America), increased intolerance, and violence (both state-sponsored and reactionary). But there remains hope, as Tom O’Riordan puts it, that “If the world political, religious and

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<sup>192</sup> Daly grounds his argument on what he calls a biblical basis, which provides a particularly cutting commentary on the ideas of equity and economics.

economic leaders combine the centrality of wealth, health, stability and security with sustainability, then there is a chance that the outcome of the unforgettable events of 11 September will generate a profoundly transformative legacy” (2002: 27).

### **Toward a Constructive Social Scientific Research Program**

Like the rest of the ecological matrix upon which they depend, humans are variable and unique. Fingerprints are a matchless amalgamation of swirls, no two human ears are the same, and human cognitive capacities (while they undoubtedly follow genetic predispositions and general developmental patterns) represent processing capacities unique to particular places and modes of life. This diversity is in large part what makes life interesting but it can be inconvenient for politics. Even in political programs labeled with terms related to “sustainability” or “sustainable development” people have different understandings of what those words mean, and differing perceptions of end goals. It is this dizzying variety that prompted Bryan Norton to propose a new “constructive” social science research program, one concerned with developing “a new kind of integrative social science, a social science that will find its role as mission-oriented science within an adaptive management process” (2005: 291). In this new research program, natural sciences have relevance to social values, which are empirically confirmed (or falsified) through interdisciplinary social scientific investigations. While Norton recognizes that pluralism inevitably leads to “a range of values from consumptive to transformative to spiritual,” those affectively held values are relevant only *within* particular communities of accountability (2005: 373). For Norton, operationalizing the definition of sustainability requires that a particular community specify its most important values within an open and adaptive process (2005: 432).

This process-oriented model is indeed helpful for viewing policy making as a series of “reflective” and “action” phases, where public discussion on community mores (the reflective

phase) lays the groundwork for experimental action, which leads to re-visitation of community goals. While Norton's model is invaluable, his contention that religious or spiritual language should not be utilized in public deliberation between communities to describe policy goals is problematic.<sup>193</sup> First, these religious values can in some cases be instructive for people outside of a particular community, and engagement with outsiders may help to inform that community's own values.<sup>194</sup> As my case studies demonstrate, core values within communities are intentionally "marketed" outside their social boundaries for the purpose of forging partnerships and educating others about community values.

Second, fencing religious values out of public deliberation not only truncates creative decision-making applicable to the people it affects, but also raises an artificial boundary within an already difficult process. To suggest that religious values are not translatable across cultures, or to argue that they make the political process too laborious and slow is to place only limited trust in the capabilities of democracy. As Norton said, "In the end, I guess, we all face a choice: We must decide whether we are first and foremost environmentalists or first and foremost democrats....For my part, given these alternatives, I choose democracy" (2005: 251). But if, as anthropologists and others are aware, most of the world's population does not draw significant boundaries between religious and political life, then democratic processes, especially those coupled with sustainable development schemes designed to help marginalized peoples across the globe *must* allow reflection and public debate on religious values to produce viable, sustainable

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<sup>193</sup> Drawing on Habermas's work, Norton states that "discourse ethics promotes multilayered communication channels that are unshaken by substantive beliefs or personal values" (2005:288).

<sup>194</sup> Fazlun Khalid, founder and director of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) told me that "working with other people helps us to educate the Muslims." He went on to say that this was a crucial piece of faith-based environmental protection, particularly in areas where Muslims engaged in violent conflict were unable to see "the issues that lie beneath their feet! [environmental issues]" (interview with Khalid, 29 May 2008). Muslims, then, were also learning from those outside of their own communities.

public policy.<sup>195</sup> At least some of the people I interviewed engage in deliberation rather than violence (to use Norton's example) precisely *because* of their religious beliefs and values, not in spite of them.<sup>196</sup> This goes against the grain of Norton's claim that such commitments to risky partnerships (commitments to negotiate with others outside of your own community) have nothing to do with "*the particular beliefs and values of the participants*" (2005: 285). In fact, in some cases they are directly related, and hiding this from public eyes may hamper the process of public debate.

In part, Norton is using a definition of religion that is "Protestant" in spirit if not in name. That is, Norton endorsed the idea that religion is a private affair confined to the home and the home community. I would argue, however, it is also a set of values that guides and supports practices that provide for the flourishing of both individuals and communities and which negotiate relationships with those outside particular communities. The reduction of religion to a private sphere separate from political and social worlds, and its dismissal as subjective and politically unhelpful is no longer acceptable. Recognizing the close relationship between cultural diversity, religion, and environmental well-being is essential to the creation of just policy regimes. Perhaps the integrative, constructive, and mission-driven social science that Norton envisions could benefit from more epistemological inputs, a sort of comparative

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<sup>195</sup> David Chidester notes that a now out of date guidebook for Christian missionaries put the number of "animistic" peoples on the planet, those who do not resonate with traditional Western categories and concepts, at roughly 40% (2005: 78, study referenced from 1991). Anthropologist Darrell Posey suggests that, excluding urban populations, indigenous peoples could amount to 85% of the world's population (2004). One publication from the IUCN, UNEP, and WWF put the number of indigenous peoples at about 200 million, or approximately 4% of the (then) global population (1991: 61).

<sup>196</sup> Norton suggests that the commitment to deliberation rather than violence should be one of the principle elements of the "glue" that holds various communities together in public dialog. If this commitment is grounded, however, in deeper commitments, then these deeper foundations could be examined in good faith by interested constituents in an effort to engage empathically with others without adjudicating the correctness or veracity of any particular set of religious, meta-ethical or metaphysical assumptions.

epistemology. But many of these alternative epistemologies are grounded in spiritual knowledge.

Noted ecologists Carl Folke, Fikret Berkes, and Johan Colding note that in sustainable development

we know...that there are *multiple epistemologies* [involved], different ethical positions with respect to the environment, and different cultural traditions in the perception of ecosystems and resources. To extend our consideration of the range of resource management alternatives requires an openness to different epistemologies and cultural traditions, and the worldview behind them (Berkes, Colding, and Folke 2002: 427).<sup>197</sup>

There is a close relationship between knowledge and power, and this relationship becomes especially crucial in intercultural encounters facilitated by sustainable development schemes. As Michael Redclift put it, “the consideration of epistemology in sustainable development carries important implications for our analysis, since it strikes at the cultural roots of quite different traditions of knowledge” (in Ghai and Vivian 1992: 33). This relationship between power and knowledge can in some cases, particularly when framed within the context of religion, stall or even dismantle negotiations altogether. But according to Redclift and others, core values, life practices, and the myths that grow from and inform them should at least be acknowledged and vetted for public scrutiny rather than dismissed as subjective matters outside the realm of interpersonal and community conversation.

One crucial gap in the implementation of sustainable development lies between the values-laden politics of those peoples who find themselves the targets of development and the ostensibly value-neutral utilitarian politics of contemporary Western liberal democracy and its accompaniment, a peculiar form of market capitalism (Wright 2009; Prugh, Costanza, and Daly 2000: 67-87; Deloria 1992: 202-253; Torgerson 1999: 120). Such democratic political

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<sup>197</sup> Public policy expert Michael Redclift notes that “What is required is the admission that we are dealing, when we observe local resource management strategies, with *multiple epistemologies* possessed by different groups of people” (Ghai, and Vivian 1992: 35, italics in original).

structures carry their own sets of foundational values, whether they are made explicit or not.<sup>198</sup>

To his credit, Norton believes that adaptive management, which lies at the heart of sustainability, is a value-laden science. But while Norton's model allows vetting of many sorts of social values in the public sphere, it leaves religious language locked within particular communities. Some political scientists argue that these value commitments (as well as a host of others) should be made public if a democratic system is to operate effectively (Gilroy and Bowersox 2002). These value sets should be debated in public, and with the full input of local populations.

Without direct attention to the resource decisions made by people on the community level and the local-level power relations that facilitate and constrain them, sustainability on a broad scale is unlikely to develop (Redclift 1992: 29). In many cases, particularly in the South, such community decisions are heavily influenced by religious life (Wright 2009). It will be helpful to unpack how some social scientists couple religious values with cultural diversity, resilience, and sustainability.

### **Concluding Remarks on Religions, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Cultural Transmission in Sustainability**

Three significant streams of religious metaphor and language – from existing religious practice (i.e., world religions, nature religions, and international civic religion, discussed in Chapter 5), the natural sciences, and the social sciences (discussed above)-- have as implicit common foci the idea of deep interconnectedness, the recognition of ecological and individual limits, and an ethics of interpersonal empathy, where democratic processes and development prospects depend on genuine attempts to “hear” the stories of cultural “others.” In most cases the priorities of these various constituencies are woven together using religious language, often

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<sup>198</sup> For example, traditional Western democratic theory assumes that the primary economic unit used for analysis is the individual, who is, at least in the process of making rational decisions, is a completely autonomous cost/benefit calculator (Thomas Prugh, Costanza and Daly 2000: 100; Posey 2006).

translated through non-governmental organizations that facilitate interactions between them. These groups are able to communicate across these boundaries (grassroots, national, international/secular, religious) using the linguistic and metaphorical content of the religious dimension of sustainability.

In the following chapters, I explore such religious production, beginning with those that are more obviously religious (in the traditional sense of the word) in Chapter 7, moving toward those that are interfaith or non-denominational (Chapter 8), and secular (Chapter 9).<sup>199</sup>

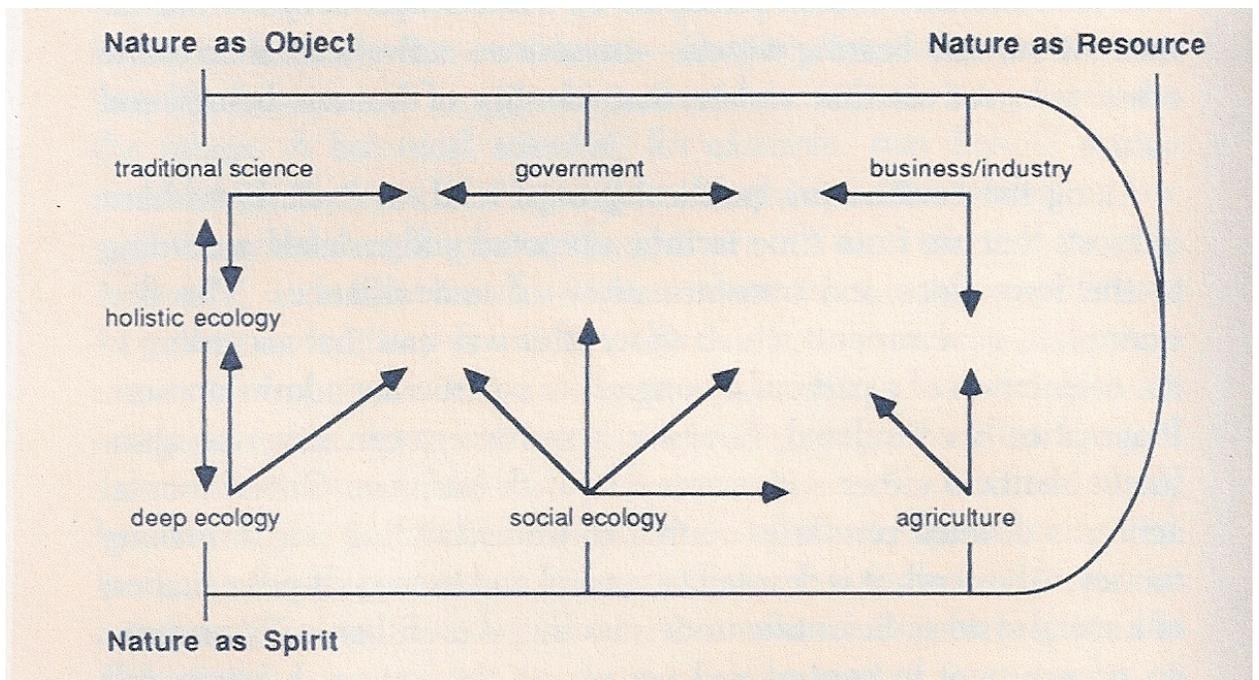


Figure 6-1. The Horseshoe Configuration of Perspectives from Killingsworth and Palmer 1992: 14.

<sup>199</sup> I do not mean to imply that those groups that are explicitly religious do not interact with other religious groups. On the contrary, they do partner with others with different religious beliefs and practices, but they do so because of teachings *within* their own tradition. The groups analyzed here that I characterize as “interfaith” are groups whose primary aim is to facilitate interactions across faiths. The secular groups also work with various religious groups, but their explicit goals are not framed religiously, but in terms of sustainability and conservation.

CHAPTER 7  
WALKING TOGETHER SEPARATELY: EVANGELICAL CREATION CARE

**Introduction**

Northland Church’s morning service started right on time as the three movie theater screens across the back of the stage lit up with thousands of stars. With the heavens speeding by on the screens, at least a dozen singers cried out repeatedly “Lord of all creation....the universe declares your majesty!” In the midst of the stars, several names for God appeared in series (Jehovah, Elohim, Yahweh, God, and others, finally concluding with “LORD” in all capitals). The song went on to recall the immensity of the universe together with the unity of the Creator God, concluding with God’s admonishment to Job “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”<sup>200</sup> A “cosmocentric” perspective was at least implied in the imagery and words, one that takes the cosmos itself as the unit of moral considerability. This sort of imagery and language is increasingly common, though its use by evangelicals should be clearly differentiated from the sort of cosmophilia endorsed by many scientists and scholars in Chapter 6.<sup>201</sup> Such an expanded sense of moral obligation may be rare among evangelical Christians but some high profile evangelical leaders are attempting to create a large-scale shift in values among the conservative Christians in the United States.

This chapter focuses specifically on the emergence of environmental advocacy among evangelical Christians in the United States, the political structures they have formed around this development, the partnerships they have brokered with others outside their faith tradition, and their local and national impacts. While the idea that there is some common “Judeo-Christian”

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<sup>200</sup> From the Hebrew Bible’s book of Job 38:4. In the passage God is reminding Job that a mere mortal could never know the deep history of the cosmos, or understand the mind of the Creator.

<sup>201</sup> Evangelical Christians believe it is important to distinguish themselves from scientists who resonate with a religious naturalism, or with other religion scholars such as Thomas Berry who advertise a scientifically-grounded “universe story” (see Swimme and Berry 1994).

historical consciousness is outdated, the claim has frequently been made that the United States' is a "Christian nation" (Harris 2008).<sup>202</sup> If Christians generally are a powerful lobby and a prevalent source of the American moral imagination, evangelical Christians, as the largest single religious group in the United States (26% of the adult population), wield significant political, economic and social power.<sup>203</sup> While some have become frustrated by the apparent political savvy of these constituencies, many do not acknowledge the thoughtful brokering of partnerships with other religious and secular groups that underlies their political and social stamina.

I refer to these Christians as "evangelicals" primarily because that is their term for self-identification. George Marsden suggests that contemporary evangelicalism includes

any Christians traditional enough to affirm the basic beliefs of the old nineteenth-century evangelical consensus," which include: "1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible; 2) the real historical character of God's saving work recorded in Scripture; 3) salvation to eternal life based on the redemptive work of Christ; 4) the importance of evangelism and missions; and 5) the importance of a spiritually transformed life (Marsden 1991: 1-2).

According to this broad definition the informants in this chapter are evangelical. As with any other religious denomination, however, there is wide variance within these boundaries. Marsden argued that evangelicalism and fundamentalism are essentially religious "*movements*," and their

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<sup>202</sup> Illustrations abound in the popular press. The Gainesville Sun (Florida), my local newspaper, includes frequent opinion pieces which insist that the United States is a Christian nation founded on Christian values, and that these values ought to play a significant role in setting policy. These local voices grow louder and more frequent when public disputes arise about including evolution in public school curricula or about which public areas can display religious symbols and texts. For example, in 2007 there was significant controversy in Florida when one school board attempted to remove all mention of the age of the earth and of macroevolution from high school science textbooks. To further illustrate, in 2003 a Georgia judge was ordered by a higher court to remove the Ten Commandments from his courtroom wall (I was living in Athens, GA, at the time). For a period, citizen support for the judge's cause (in defense of the "Christian nation") was demonstrated by the rash of plastic placards that bore the Commandments that appeared in yards across the nation.

<sup>203</sup> Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, <http://religions.pewforum.org/>, accessed 1 July 2008. Evangelical Christians are the largest single religious group in the US, according to the Pew Study, nearly 2.5% larger than Catholics, and a full 8% larger than the mainline Protestant Christian denominations. Although not all who are classified as evangelical Christians in the Pew study would resonate with the views of those I discuss here, most would agree in many cases on legislation on other matters, including life and death and marriage issues.

identity cannot be neatly confirmed by definitional fiat (1991: 3, italics his).<sup>204</sup> Ecologist and evangelical Calvin DeWitt used an expansive definition which stated that *evangelicalism* exists within nearly all Christian denominations, including Catholicism (2006: 572). Paralleling Marsden's definition to some extent, DeWitt characterized evangelicalism as a belief in the Bible as the authoritative source for understanding how to live on earth, and the belief that the "good news" of salvation must be actively proclaimed.<sup>205</sup> Generally, evangelicals are distrustful of both secular and ecclesiastical authority, which has arguably hampered their engagement of the natural sciences.<sup>206</sup> But their knowledge of and dialog with the natural sciences is increasing, and the individuals I interviewed often cited scientists as central to their understanding of environmental issues.

The evangelicals discussed here are often criticized by those within their own faith communities for earnestly engaging with the broader secular society. They are atypical and controversial figures within their faith communities. Certainly the evangelicals who attend the 12,000 member Northland Church in Orlando, Florida and representatives of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) are very different from those who identify themselves as evangelicals and resist mountaintop removal in Appalachia, or those who consider themselves evangelical but generally resist participation in the secular world. The peculiar network discussed here is seeking to change how evangelicals relate to the broader culture, and to change evangelical culture by cultivating some socially progressive policies within a theologically

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<sup>204</sup> For good introductions to the emergence of evangelicalism in the United States, a topic which is not my concern here, see Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1995) and Marsden's *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (1991).

<sup>205</sup> The term "evangelical" derives from the Greek *euangelion*, meaning a bearer of good news. DeWitt detailed this etymology in two public addresses in Gainesville, Florida April 7 and 8, 2008 (see also DeWitt 2006: 572).

<sup>206</sup> DeWitt noted that their distrust of authority has also prevented many evangelicals from embracing biblical teachings on environmental degradation, and knowledge of the content of early Hebrew or Greek biblical texts (2006: 573).

conservative constituency. These are non-traditional, non-denominational evangelical leaders who take it as part of their religious vocation to cultivate partnerships with those outside their own evangelical communities.

Importantly however, evangelicals have been careful to set themselves apart from other religious responses to the environment, and especially from secular environmentalism—the way they put it, they are “walking together separately.”<sup>207</sup> The partnerships they form often fail to achieve any lasting results. But when the partnerships *do* work, they are significant and lasting in part because the participants are clear about the sources and shape of their core values. Rather than use these religious values as bargaining chips, however, these evangelicals use them as socio-political markers to help those within their communities and outsiders better understand the sets of rules by which they intend to negotiate. Analysis of these strategic relationships debunks stereotypes of conservative evangelicals which suggest that they ignore scientific facts, are naïve to political manipulations, and culturally insular. To better grasp the ethical foundations of evangelical environmentalism, it is helpful to understand the genesis of this religious social movement.

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<sup>207</sup> I first heard this phrase used by Alexei Laushkin, Program Assistant for the EEN in our interview on 13 May, 2008). When I used that phrase to describe evangelical environmentalism, Jim Ball, Executive Director and President of the EEN, agreed that it was an apt characterization of the way that evangelical Christians relate to non-evangelicals. Ben Campbell, another evangelical respondent employed by Conservation International (see chapter six) also agreed that it was an appropriate description for how he viewed his spiritually-centered life in relation to secular conservation advocates.

## **The Genesis of Evangelical Environmentalism: From Environmental Stewardship to Creation Care<sup>208</sup>**

The history that I present here does not describe all evangelicals in the United States. Ecological issues are a growing concern among evangelicals, but that does not mean that they are a concern for all evangelicals. The respondents I draw upon here, however, represent a high profile group of leaders who are changing the public face of “evangelicalism” in the United States (Calvin DeWitt, Jim Ball, Joel Hunter and others), and thus the stories they tell about the sources of their advocacy is relevant to my project. All evangelical respondents mentioned a relatively short list of people as largely responsible for the emergence of evangelical environmentalism, including Jim Ball, Richard Cizik, and Calvin DeWitt.<sup>209</sup>

### **Lynn White and the Greening of Evangelicalism**

Evangelical environmental advocacy emerged, with awareness of ecological degradation generally, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. To date most academic treatments of evangelical environmentalism trace the intellectual roots of the “greening” of the world’s religions back to historian Lynn White’s argument (1967) that the dominion theme in Genesis, through an elective affinity for particularly invasive technologies, caused the current ecological crisis (see DeWitt 2006: 577; Larsen 2001: 39-85; Wilkinson 1980: 104; Schaeffer 1970). Impelled by White to demonstrate that the Christian tradition could be a vibrant, living religion relevant to

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<sup>208</sup> Jim Ball, founder and director of the EEN suggested that it was important to clarify what I meant by “creation care,” since many Christians, as well as people of other faiths, use it to describe their activism for the environment. I use it here to refer to a specifically evangelical Christian understanding of creation care that views this activism not as *environmental* activism, but as advocacy for God’s whole creation. There is no distinction in this cosmivision between advocacy for the poor (“the least of these”) and advocacy for the environment, for both are undertaken in obedience to God (not in response to some perceived ecological crisis).

<sup>209</sup> My intention here is to highlight significant benchmarks in the development of creation care, not to offer an exhaustive history of its emergence. David Larsen’s two volume dissertation at the University of Chicago, titled *God’s Gardeners: American Protestant Evangelicals Confront Environmentalism* (2001), provides such a history with a detailed account of the tributaries and main events in the emergence of what he termed “evangelical environmentalism.”

contemporary problems several Christians began rifling through their traditions searching for glimmers of green. Evangelicals were no exception.

The first extended evangelical response to White came when theologian Francis Schaeffer published *Pollution and the Death of Man* in 1970, which provided much of the theological foundation for what later became known as evangelical environmentalism or creation care. Schaeffer answered Lynn White's charge by arguing that a *perversion* of the Christian message was responsible for environmental disasters. Schaeffer argued that humans were divinely-appointed rulers over creation, charged with maintaining harmonious relationships between humans and nature. Christianity, properly understood, could provide the transcendent grounding that could combat what Schaeffer perceived as widespread cultural anxiety.

According to Schaeffer, toward the end of his life Charles Darwin expressed a profound existential anxiety derived from his realization that "nature, including man, is based only on the impersonal plus time plus chance" (Schaeffer 1970: 11). Schaeffer interpreted Darwin to mean that he could no longer find beauty in nature because he could discern in it no divine spark. A parallel inability to find joy in nature, Schaeffer believed, had become widespread by the late 1960s even manifesting in popular music such as The Doors' song "Strange Days," from which Schaeffer took the inspiration and title for his first chapter (1970: 12).<sup>210</sup>

For Schaeffer, the basic tenets of an ecologically responsible Christianity included the following key concepts: a) nature was valuable *in itself* because it was made by God (1970: 47); b) humans and the whole creation are *equal in their origin* being created by God (1970: 48); c)

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<sup>210</sup> The title of the chapter is "Our Fair Sister," drawn from the lyrics, "What have they done to the earth? / What have they done to our fair sister?" Schaeffer's use of this song is ironic, for The Doors were important purveyors of the music that was an integral part of the subcultural milieu that Schaeffer collectively and pejoratively referred to as "hippies" and "pantheists." In addition, Jim Morrison, The Doors' lead singer, famously called out to a crowd gathered outside a Los Angeles nightclub that he was "the Lizard King" and "could do anything." This demonic moniker is now frequently associated with Morrison in memorabilia.

Christ's incarnation indicates that the physical world will be redeemed; and d) humans, created in the image of God, must exercise a wiser sort of "dominion" over the "lower" orders of nature (1970: 50, 69-77).<sup>211</sup> These foundational ideas became central to later enunciations of evangelical creation care.

By the late 1970s, other environmentally-concerned evangelical academics had organized a forum, the first official evangelical gathering dedicated to implementing a practical evangelical response to White's challenge and the church's perceived inaction. This forum was launched in 1977 by the Calvin College Center for Christian Scholarship, which focused its initial year on "Christian Stewardship and Natural Resources" (Wilkinson 1980: vii; DeWitt 2006: 579). The Fellows selected by the College to participate were Peter DeVos (professor of Philosophy), Calvin DeWitt (professor of Environmental Studies), Eugene Dykema (professor of Economics), Vernon Ehlers (professor of Physics) and Loren Wilkinson (professor of English). They published the results of their research as *Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources* (Wilkinson 1980).<sup>212</sup> This book extended the theological foundations laid by Schaeffer, providing a more detailed analysis of ecological degradation, land use, population, and technology, and effectively introduced the idea of Christian *stewardship* as an evangelical environmental theme.

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<sup>211</sup> The italics in this paragraph are from the original text. Schaeffer's work is one early illustration of the idea that non-human nature possesses intrinsic worth ("nature was valuable *in itself*") without dependence on a bio- or eco-centric ethics. In this case, recognition of intrinsic value derives from a theocentric viewpoint which retains a strong human exceptionalist component, not from the perceived sacredness of nature itself.

<sup>212</sup> Their focus was on what was then called "Christian Environmental Stewardship" (interview with DeWitt 08 April 2008). David Larsen, in his authoritative dissertation on evangelical concern for the environment from 1960-2000, termed this movement *evangelical environmentalism* (Larsen 2000). DeWitt seemed uncertain about the value of the term "environmentalism" to describe evangelical motivations, but has used the term in print (DeWitt 2006). He has emphasized that evangelicals are not sympathetic with the claims typically advanced by environmentalists, and evangelical care for creation should not be confused with environmentalist sentiment (2006: 571).

## The Further Development of Biblical Foundations for Evangelical Environmentalism

The authors of *Earthkeeping* (1980) emphasized that Lynn White's thesis was central to the development of ecological evangelicalism: "It is our thesis that White is, with a few important exceptions, correct in his analysis of the effect of Christianity on views of nature" (1980: 104). Among the most important exceptions for the Calvin Fellows was that it was *Christendom*, not Christianity which was to blame for the ecological crisis: "What White and others have pointed to as the destructive influence of Christianity is, in fact, the destructive influence of pre-Christian ideas, imperfectly transformed by the gospel, and too often mistaken for the gospel itself" (104). The Fellows echoed the argument advanced by Schaeffer (1970) that it was not Christianity, but a *perversion* of Christianity that was responsible for the environmental crisis.

It has been particularly important to evangelicals to distance themselves from Christendom (which they believe is tainted by pre-Christian influences), and from environmentalism, which in conversation and in evangelical literature is often equated with a religious reverence for nature itself.<sup>213</sup> As Wilkinson and his colleagues put it,

All Christians immediately disassociate themselves from such views of the relationship between God and nature [the identification of God with nature], for if there is one thing about biblical religion which is abundantly clear, it is that God is the maker of the world, and thus he is completely apart from it. He does not depend on it, but it depends utterly and completely on him (1980: 205)

Thus, while the human is considered an exception within the animal world, continuity with nature is emphasized:

What the words and the whole account [the Genesis account of creation in the Hebrew Bible] suggest, then, is what contemporary biologists and ecologists have been trying hard

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<sup>213</sup> If the influences of dark green religion reach as deeply and broadly into environmentalism as Taylor (2009) believes they do, then these evangelicals' fears may be warranted.

to tell us: whatever else they are, humans are also *earth*; they share their nature with its soil, its plants, its animals (Wilkinson 1980: 208).

The authors of *Earthkeeping* (1980) argued that nature tends toward stability, and that, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, the ecosphere would eventually cause human population and consumption to stabilize. Christianity also, they agreed, promoted the idea of harmony between humans and the creation entrusted to them, and thus “a task arising from the Christian gospel is to bring about such stability, and to do it through means other than starvation and warfare” (Wilkinson 1980: 44). In a remarkably astute analysis they suggested that inadequate food distribution, population growth, and unfettered market capitalism all contributed to social inequity, a symptom of a “fallen” society.<sup>214</sup>

This creation-centered theology remains the foundation of creation care efforts today. DeWitt, in two public lectures in Gainesville, Florida in April 2008 recited nearly verbatim the interpretation of the Hebrew words *abad* and *shamar* provided in the volume authored by the Calvin Fellows. These terms are used in the Genesis creation story to describe human responsibilities toward creation. DeWitt argued (as had Wilkinson et al.) that these Hebrew terms connote humans’ call to *serve* and *preserve* God’s garden (or creation), to exercise their dominion in a non-coercive partnership with non-human nature (interview with DeWitt 8 April 2008; Wilkinson 1980: 209).

In recent decades, when climate change grew into a focal point of activism and international politics, it was frequently suggested that natural disasters were on the rise, and that human suffering caused by climate change would likely increase. The poor, many evangelical

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<sup>214</sup> According to these Christians, humans are born with an inherently degraded spiritual and emotional capacity as a result of Adam and Eve’s original act of disobedience in the Genesis narrative. This act of rebellion, partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, is often (particularly after Augustine’s work in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE) referred to as “the Fall.”

leaders realized, would bear the brunt of the impacts of climate change.<sup>215</sup> This creation-centered theology pioneered by the Calvin Fellows and others complexified, adding a biblically-grounded concern for “our neighbors” to the existing notion that humans were God’s beneficent gardeners.

### **The Evangelical Environmental Network**

By 1980, a small evangelical magazine called *Firmament* (published by Bob Carling) had emerged to promote the spread of evangelical environmentalism, while DeWitt and others formed the new Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies.<sup>216</sup> The Institute offered university-level coursework and fieldwork opportunities in environmental studies. Students remained enrolled at their home institution, but could transfer credits from Au Sable for courses that integrated the natural sciences and their methodologies with theological instruction.

The mission of the Institute was to challenge the two perceived shortcomings of Christianity in the public sphere. First it was designed to combat the fragmentation of knowledge by conceiving of environmental studies as an integrative discipline dedicated to “integration of knowledge of the Creation [science] with biblical principles.”<sup>217</sup> Second, it was meant to correct the behavior of humans, including evangelicals, who “corporately and individually, [had] become destroyers of creation” (DeWitt 2006: 584). Between 1980 and 1985

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<sup>215</sup> Richard Cizik, Joel Hunter, and Jim Ball all cited this as central to their understanding of creation care. While the first creation care publications focused on the relationships between humans, God, and nature, later theological reflection focused on Jesus’s imperative to care for “the least of these” (this quote comes in Matthew 25:40, where Jesus suggests that caring for the poor, sick and hungry is equivalent to caring for Jesus).

<sup>216</sup> The magazine was later called *Green Cross*, and later still *Creation Care*. According to DeWitt, Bob Carling was active from the early days of evangelical environmentalism and remained active in the EEN after its founding.

<sup>217</sup> From their website, <http://www.ausable.org/au.ourmission.cfm>, accessed 7 August 2008. According to Calvin DeWitt the apparent dearth of practicable environmental ethics is a direct result of the fragmentation of knowledge. That is, the division of the Academy into distinct disciplines has encouraged the erosion of constructive fields of study whose task was, at least until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to provide some connective tissue between different areas of inquiry. Theology, in this understanding of educational history, held the curriculum together and provided it with purpose, ensuring that education was used for the public good (from interview with DeWitt, 08 April 2008).

eighteen institutions had agreed to accept college-level credits from Au Sable, and 12 professors participated in Au Sable's programs (DeWitt 2006: 579).<sup>218</sup> Over the next decade the Au Sable Institute and other evangelical responses to the environment grew, prompting David Larsen to characterize this increasingly prevalent stream of evangelical theology as "the AuSable theology" (2000: 203-220). The outlines of what was to become the AuSable theology were sketched out in *Earthkeeping* (Wilkinson 1980), and it was this biblically-centered vision that attended to instructions from the "Book of Nature."

The Au Sable Institute organized an international consultation on evangelical eco-theology in 1992, and at this meeting the International Evangelical Environmental Network (IEEN) was created (interview with DeWitt 08 April 2008; DeWitt 2006: 579) with the impassioned claim that Christians "must dare to proclaim the full truth about the environmental crisis in the face of powerful persons, pressures and institutions which profit from concealing the truth" (quote from the summarizing report in DeWitt 2006: 580).

Led by Jim Ball, a graduate of Drew Theological Seminary, the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) (according to DeWitt, a U.S.-based derivative of the IEEN) held their first meeting the following year and captured the phrase "creation care" from the title of another small-distribution magazine dedicated to evangelical environmental stewardship.<sup>219</sup>

According to their website, the EEN's work centers simply on "worshipping God, loving His

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<sup>218</sup> All of the participating institutions are small Christian colleges and seminaries in the US.

<sup>219</sup> David Larsen reports that the EEN was a ministry of Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), a group spearheaded by Ron Sider. DeWitt, both in our interview and in print (2006) has described the genesis of the EEN the way I have here, as derivative from the IEEN. There is no information on the website of ESA or IEEN that describes the EEN as a partner or offshoot. Alexei Laushkin of EEN reported that he thought that the EEN derived from a joint ministry of ESA and WorldVision, a Christian development organization. Thus, I have been unable to determine if there was, or continues to be any relationship between ESA and ISEE, but neither of these groups claims the EEN as a derivative. Ball was unresponsive to my requests for clarification. Interestingly, this part of the emergence of evangelical environmentalism appears to be contested.

people, and caring for His creation.”<sup>220</sup> Ball and others immediately set to work on the “Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation,” which was signed by dozens of high profile academics and pastoral and lay leaders.<sup>221</sup> The Declaration brought a rush of attention to Ball and the EEN, who had helped to engineer the declaration and promoted it among high profile evangelical leaders. The EEN, the Au Sable Institute and other evangelical organizations continue to actively participate in ecological justice campaigns, particularly those related to climate change.

By 2005 the Au Sable Institute’s influence had grown with more than sixty participating colleges and seventy professors. As the largest single religious group in the United States, evangelicals exercise significant sway in the political realm especially with regard to environmental legislation, and the EEN and the Au Sable Institute help to encourage the recognition and wise use of this power.<sup>222</sup>

### **Northland Church, Longwood, Florida<sup>223</sup>**

In the 1960s, alternative, contemporary Christian worship services were being held at the Circle Church in Chicago, Illinois.<sup>224</sup> Other churches, patterned on their vibrant, simple worship services began to spring up in other parts of the country including in Clearwater, Florida. Two

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<sup>220</sup> See <http://www.creationcare.org/>, accessed 7 August 2008. The editor of *Creation Care* was Bob Carling, whom DeWitt credits with the name that eventually stuck to this Christian social movement (interview 08 April 2008).

<sup>221</sup> See <http://www.creationcare.org/resources/declaration.php>, accessed 7 August 2008.

<sup>222</sup> For instance, in 2008 Jim Ball was one of the keynote panelists for a session on faith and climate change at Florida Governor Charlie Christ’s Climate Change Summit, attended primarily by business and industry leaders. This illustrates that evangelicals have a powerful political voice nationally.

<sup>223</sup> A more detailed accounting of Northland’s history than can be provided here is available at their website, from which the information included here was drawn: [http://www.northlandchurch.net/about\\_us/Our\\_History/index.html](http://www.northlandchurch.net/about_us/Our_History/index.html), accessed 10 January 2009.

<sup>224</sup> The Circle Church was envisioned as a progressive church. It was mentioned in a 1969 article in *Time* magazine which described a pervasive existential need for Americans, and particularly youth, to seek out a vibrant, living spirituality rather than the institutionalized religions of their parents (Fri., 26 December 1969, available online at <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,941816,00.html>, accessed 4 February 2009).

members of the Clearwater Circle Church, Lyle and Marge Nelson, were transferred to Orlando, Florida. They started a Circle Church in Orlando, and eventually, in 1972, the Nelsons and nine others established Northland Church (on the north side of Orlando), meeting in two elementary school gymnasiums over their first ten years.

By 1984, the congregation had grown to 500 people, and it became clear that a more permanent facility was needed. As the congregation's leaders searched for a structure, a rift emerged within the congregation between those who wished to remain loyal to the founding principles of the Circle Church (small congregation size, no ownership of buildings or other structures), and others who did not wish to remain constrained by numbers. The latter group purchased a defunct roller skating rink and in 1985 pastor Joel Hunter joined them. The renovations on the building were completed in 1988, and between 1985 and 1997 the congregation grew from 200 to more than 5,000 people. In 2007, construction was completed on their new 160,000 square foot, forty-two million dollar facility next door to the old skating rink. The church and the distribution of its message have grown immensely. More importantly for this project, Joel Hunter, as a Board member for the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and the Evangelical Environmental Network, has since 2005 become one of the most important evangelical voices for creation care.

While evangelical policy advocacy in the past decade has focused most visibly on opposing abortion and restricting the legal definition of marriage to the union of a man and a woman, there is another constituency emerging among evangelicals that eschews some of the fundamentalist leanings of more conservative evangelicals. This increasingly vocal group has been re-investing political energy into issues that are directly concerned with ministering to the poor (both at home and abroad) and on protecting creation. It is through the convergence of

resource shortages and wars that more people will perish, they believe. Thus, the ethical pronouncements focused on policing marriage boundaries and life and death issues have for some morphed into a more globally aware ethics of accountability to the poor. Contrary to the perception that evangelicals shy away from scientific knowledge, many of these leaders have intentionally formed working alliances with scientists to increase their own political acumen and weight in the international policy sphere.

### **God Doesn't Speak with Forked Tongue: Evangelical Leaders and Scientific Knowledge**

Joel Hunter, pastor of Northland Church (Longwood, FL) admitted that many Americans believe that evangelicals are opposed to science, and try to inject religion into politics. It was a charge that he was well prepared to answer:

They're lumping together...actually theologically, they're called fundamentalists—and fundamentalists do eschew learning and science, and you know, things of the mind.... They've got a battle going on with the world...things of the world. The much larger constituency are evangelicals who absolutely see no...contradiction between science and scripture. They do not believe that God speaks with forked tongue. You know, He used one tongue to create scripture and another tongue to create science (interview, 31 March 2008).

Dr. Hunter and other evangelicals I interviewed tended to agree on two things: a) science was a crucially important ingredient in understanding our world and in working toward environmentally responsible and sustainable behaviors, and b) “scientism,” the valorization of science as the ultimate arbiter of truth, was misplaced faith in a social construction (though an admittedly valuable one). Even though they shared some commonalities, there was a range of positions on the importance of science to moral reasoning.

For example, Raymond Randall, volunteer head of the “Creation, I Care” Committee at Dr. Hunter’s Northland Church, suggested that “It’s when we elevate it [science] to the primary thing, that’s when we run into a problem. Both sides [in the debate over climate change] think they’ve got the ‘truth’ and we’re not getting anywhere” (author’s interview 30 March 2008). In

our conversation, Randall cited Dr. Hunter's position on the relationship between science and faith. If there is a discrepancy between science and scripture the appropriate response, according to Randall, is to look at the disagreement systematically, noting that either scripture has been misinterpreted or that the scientific data is flawed (interview 30 March 2008).

Randall declined to participate as the director of a non-profit volunteer network sponsored by Interfaith Power and Light (IPL) (a religiously-inspired alternative energy organization, see Chapter 8 or more details). Some staff members of IPL believed the refusal stemmed from his desire to avoid openly endorsing the science suggesting that climate change was anthropogenic (from interview with Sally Bingham, 6 July 2008).<sup>225</sup> Randall, however, suggested that his reticence actually stemmed from the motivations cited by IPL for changing energy use and other behaviors. In Randall's view, IPL endorses the idea that shifts in earth's climatic patterns have been caused by humans, and thus works to utilize the political weight of faith communities to correct the crisis. In contrast, for Randall, scientific evidence that humans are responsible for climate change does not inform his participation in creation care. Randall works against climate change because he believes that he is being obedient to God's wishes, not because he is concerned about the consequences of human induced climate change. For Randall, it is the source of motivation that differs: IPL's motivation is this-worldly, while his own motivation is transcendent. Because they are an interfaith group, IPL cannot use explicitly Christian theological language as the centerpiece of their public argument. For some the distinction may be minor, but for evangelicals, it is a particularly important one. As Joel Hunter put it, "The issue to evangelical Christians isn't global warming; the issue is whether or not we

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<sup>225</sup> Bingham is the founder and director of Interfaith Power and Light.

will exercise a moral and biblical obedience to a direct command of God (Genesis 2:15)” (Hunter 2007).<sup>226</sup>

Although the perception was that Randall was uncomfortable with science, in his understanding the science was irrelevant to his behavior—whether climate change was anthropogenic or not he was obeying a biblical mandate by acting to steward the earth by reducing human impacts on the environment. But he underlined the importance of the core values that provided the motivation for action: “If you look at ‘Climate Change,’ ‘Sustainability’ and ‘Creation Care,’ the monikers given [to the sets of social movements I called sustainability] by the environmental movement, the business movement, and the church [respectively], the actions taken are largely the same” (interview 30 May 2008). He noted that reducing energy consumption, increasing water efficiency, and reducing solid waste were common elements between these approaches. But “It’s the motivation that’s different,” he told me: “In the environmental movement it’s ‘We’re gonna save the world...our world is ending,’; In the business movement it’s, ‘Hey, you know what, at least for the time being, we can probably capture market share—make a little more money’; In the church it’s ‘being more biblically obedient’” (interview 30 May 2008).

This is an excellent example of why it may be important to include debate about core values and deep beliefs in cooperative enterprises, even when interpreting scientific evidence, for it is clear that the lenses through which such scientific data is viewed make a difference. Despite differing values, it is possible that diverse constituencies could work together toward common

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<sup>226</sup> This quote was taken from *Creation Care* magazine, published by the EEN, which printed an excerpt of Hunter’s *Right Wing, Wrong Bird* (2006). The article was on the EEN’s website (<http://www.creationcare.org/magazine/winter07.php>) accessed on 9 September 2008.

policy goals. But a practical convergence of values may never emerge if the values underlying practical actions keep different parties from working together to begin with.<sup>227</sup>

Dr. Hunter volunteered his understanding of the relationship between religion and science in our interview (31 March 2008):

We believe that if there seems to be a disagreement between science and scripture, it's because either we've misinterpreted scripture, or, science hasn't caught up yet.... There was a time, for example, when science thought virgin birth was ludicrous, now there's a whole field of study called parthenogenesis.<sup>228</sup>

While almost certainly not attempting to rob the virgin birth of Jesus of its supernatural importance, Hunter is, at least in this instance, indicating that a non-interventionist perspective on divine action could be as theologically satisfying as a more fundamentalist perspective which conceives of God's action working against natural laws in many cases.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Bryan Norton's well-known work *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists* (1991) argued that although anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric ethical theories might disagree on the ultimate source and locus of value, they would typically concur on practical recommendations for environmental policy. In this case, practical convergence might be prevented by underlying value commitments, suggesting that in many ethically rich situations practical convergence may not be possible without the negotiation of core values and deep beliefs.

<sup>228</sup> Dr. Hunter's mention of parthenogenesis (a natural phenomenon where birth results from an unfertilized egg) interested me greatly, for I had never heard that mentioned in the context of explaining the virgin birth of Jesus. In a brief search I could find no references which indicated that it was possible for mammals to give birth from an unfertilized egg, but the implication was that this idea was circulating in evangelical Christian circles. However, recently evidence has pointed to this phenomenon in at least two captive sharks (see <http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/10/10/shark.virgin.birth.ap/index.html>, accessed 10 October 2008). Parthenogenesis is also thought to occur under population duress in certain birds, amphibians and reptiles. It is interesting to ponder the effects that a scientific explanation for Jesus' birth would have on Christian theology. Presumably it would still be considered miraculous. But if so, this would likely require a revision of the popular understanding of *miracles* as events which suspend or overrule natural laws. Several theologians have advanced complex models of divine action in which God is "non-interventionist" and works through the forces and relationships of nature, not instead of them (see for example Murphy and Ellis 1996; Russell 1998)

<sup>229</sup> There is an extensive literature detailing the differences between interventionist and non-interventionist understandings of divine action, the best of which has been produced by scientists, philosophers of science and scientifically sophisticated theologians through the Center for Theology and Natural Sciences in Berkeley in collaboration with the Vatican Observatory. In short, a non-interventionist perspective on divine action suggests that whatever divinity exists works *through* natural laws, not instead of or against them. For an excellent article on the subject see Robert J. Russell's "Special Providence and Genetic Mutation: A New Defense of Theistic Evolution" (1998).

Randall's and Hunter's accounts of the relationship between religion and science were nearly identical, which provides evidence that ideas and interpretive frameworks can be transmitted between actors engaged in similar networks. Importantly, these ideas and interpretive frameworks are also translated and transmitted to those outside the evangelical community.<sup>230</sup> For example, evangelicals have formed alliances with the scientific community, and through these alliances, Hunter cultivated a relationship with E.O. Wilson.<sup>231</sup> Hunter told me he once asked Wilson, "So, why are you guys teaming up with evangelicals?" According to Hunter, Wilson replied,

Are you kidding? If you took all of the humanist organizations in the United States...all of these [secular] organizations, took all of their membership, we'd add up to maybe 5,000 people—that's half of your church! You've got 30 million members in the NAE! Why would we not know that we need you to encompass this [the environmental crisis] (interview with Hunter 31 March 2008).

Hunter called these partnerships "little confederations, little alliances," but he was forthcoming about the big tactical advantage provided by these little alliances: "The curious thing about this is that the scientists, a lot of them, are just secular humanists, I mean they're not believers. But they've got the information *we* need, because evangelicals don't have the science. But we've got the base that they need" (interview 31 March 2008). Whether or not the political advantages that accrue to both sides are made explicit, they are important in motivating the formation and maintenance of such partnerships.

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<sup>230</sup> In both cases, such cultural transmission could be plausibly explained by the biological (or viral) model.

<sup>231</sup> A series of meetings occurred in Thomasville, GA from 30 November to 2 December 2006 sponsored by Center for Health and Global Environment at Harvard Medical School and the National Association of Evangelicals. See their press release, accessed through the "Evangelicals and Scientists United to Protect Creation" website at [www.creationcareforpastors.com/PDF\\_files/creationcarepressrelease.pdf](http://www.creationcareforpastors.com/PDF_files/creationcarepressrelease.pdf), accessed 4 February 2009. Their joint statement was released in January of 2007.

### **Right Relationship: Human Partnering from a Cosmocentric Perspective**

At a Sunday service at Northside Church Dr. Hunter held aloft his grandmother's Bible, well-worn and a bit tattered, and told the congregation (somewhere around 12,000, with others tuning in through simultaneous webcast) with tears in his eyes that sometimes he simply opened the Bible at random, pointed to a verse, and meditated on what that particular passage had to teach him that day. It was a way of putting trust in God, believing that God's word would be relevant to whatever struggle he was facing at that time. Reflecting on this trust in the Lord, Dr. Hunter said "You can't change others, but you can let God change you" (30 March 2008). He told this story in the context of discussing interpersonal relationships: God wants humans to have healthy, loving relationships because God *is* a relationship (a Trinitarian one). Relationship, at least according to the lessons gleaned by Dr. Hunter from his grandmother's Bible, means engaging with others with an open heart without the expectation that the other will change to suit your needs or desires, but with the hope that you can nonetheless have a positive relationship together. "Righteousness," Dr. Hunter emphasized, "is about meeting the demands of relationships" (service 30 March 2008). This is the evangelical Christian manifestation of one of the central themes in sustainability discourse, the ethics of interpersonal empathy.

Recognizing the interdependence of life is one of the key common elements typically found in sustainability advocacy, and it is evident in these evangelical circles in the recognition that the entire created world has a common ancestry (it ultimately derives from God) and ideally exists in a state of *shalom*, or right relationship.<sup>232</sup> At the "Let There Be Light" Creation Care Conference (C3) held at Northland Church, a panel consisting of Dr. Hunter, Rabbi Steven

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<sup>232</sup> Michael Guinan's *The Pentateuch* stresses the strong presence of stability and order within the natural realm during the creation, and uses the idea of *shalom* to describe them. Though he does not use the term, Theodore Hiebert's *The Yahwist's Landscape* (1996) also discusses Israelite relationship with the land and the natural order.

Engel, and Imam Muhammad Musri discussed the importance of maintaining a right relationship with all of creation. Engel invoked the “spaceship earth”<sup>233</sup> metaphor, and using terminology that permeates the sustainability movement, stated that “we are all related” (21 February 2008).

Here is one significant difference between this evangelical constituency situated within the sustainability milieu and constituents of the environmentalist milieu investigated by Taylor (2009): for the environmentalist milieu understanding “common ancestry” is linked to evolutionary emergence; for evangelicals it suggests that all creatures and indeed the whole world was created by, and is thus dependent upon, God.<sup>234</sup> These evangelicals do not perceive a conflict between science and their theology. All of these accept some of the tenets of evolutionary theory, though typically not in the way it is typically understood by scientists. However, in that, they are no different from the mainstream citizenry (approximately fifty percent of whom believe that the world was created in the past 10,000 years in its present form). Only 5% of scientists, versus 47% of the general public believe that humans were created in their present form several thousand years ago. Ultimately, nearly half of the general population is at least skeptical of Darwinism (Holden: 769).

At the C3 at Northland Church, Richard Cizik, the Vice President for Governmental Affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), implored those gathered to raise their standards for providing moral leadership in the crusade against human-induced climate change and environmental destruction. He called on the gathered group of ministers and lay

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<sup>233</sup> This metaphor was first invoked by ecological economist Kenneth Boulding in the early 1970s.

<sup>234</sup> These evangelicals do not perceive a conflict between science and their theology. All of these accept some of the tenets of evolutionary theory, though typically not in the way it is typically understood by scientists. However, in that, they are no different from the mainstream citizenry (approximately fifty percent of whom believe that the world was created in the past 10,000 years in its present form). Only 5% of scientists, versus 47% of the general public believe that humans were created in their present form several thousand years ago. Ultimately, nearly half of the general population is at least skeptical of Darwinism (Holden: 769).

leaders to cultivate “transformational relationships,” those which raise the ethical standards and aspirations of both the leader, and the followers.<sup>235</sup> Cizik is undoubtedly one of these transformational leaders, was one of the most significant figures to give creation care political teeth, and according to DeWitt was one of the first to “inject” the popular evangelical community with the environmental message (interview with DeWitt, 8 April 2008).<sup>236</sup> According to Cizik, many members of Congress now consider evangelical leaders the “go-to” people for climate change issues—they have become political “insiders” (C3 Conference 21 February 2008). They are perceived as the most educated on the issues, and most aware of the moral implications of policy decisions.

Leaders like Hunter and Cizik are making decisions from a religious standpoint, directly connecting (in the private and public spheres) their activism with their Christian moral framework. They are intentionally brokering tactical partnerships with the expressed aim of generating large-scale change in the formulation of public policy, the management of exchange relations (they favor more “just” economic arrangements), and the inclusion of spiritual and religious values in the public sphere. These leaders are generating ripple effects among their followers.

Dan Hardaway, a member of Hunter’s Northland Church, reflected on how his faith leaders had encouraged him to make small behavior changes, which in turn affected the quality of his relationships with others. Hardaway was moved enough by his relationships to post a thoughtful testimonial on the “Creation, I Care” website:

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<sup>235</sup> The title of the talk was “For God’s Sake: Literally.”

<sup>236</sup> The term “inject” is DeWitt’s language. As the discussion above noted, evangelical environmentalism goes much deeper than Cizik’s work, but DeWitt was crediting Cizik here with effectively bringing creation care into the public sphere and making it a political issue.

I felt like for the first time, as I have taken some very minor steps, I was engaging people who I sought to reach. Now instead of just articulating my differences, I am making progress in loving them. I've even become vigilant about rinsing out the recyclables. We are buying more efficient light bulbs and even bought a blanket for my hot water heater. Christ is still returning, and I'm not a tree hugger, but the environment is becoming an area of concern.<sup>237</sup>

Alexei Laushkin, Program Assistant at the EEN, considers his faith centrally relevant to the cultivation of these relationships with those outside his evangelical community because he believes it is important for evangelicals to be witnesses for Christ with their entire lives, not just on one or two politically hot topics. Religious values, in this case, make a significant difference in the amount, manner, and quality of engagement in politics and the public sphere. Laushkin put it this way:

If religious groups are going to be religious groups *in* society...then they have to not necessarily be tied in to a particular ideology. If they're going to speak to transcendent values, they have to speak about these transcendent values in all parts of life...and developing those relationships and making those arguments, you know, in the public square in a way that doesn't turn people off with our language, but helps people understand who we are and where we're coming from...in a constructive fashion (interview with author, 13 May 2008).

If religion and sustainability are both fundamentally about relating to ethnic, cultural, or ethical "others," then these evangelicals are participating in sustainable relationships when they invoke the evangelical calling to pay particular attention to the needs of marginalized others, those whose political voices are muted, or whose physical opportunities are limited. At the C3 conference, Cizik invoked a well-known question in Christian circles, "who is my neighbor?"<sup>238</sup> Drawing on the biblical tale of Daniel, Cizik noted that there are politicians in Washington "who sacrifice the Empire for their friends," specifically their oil and gas producing friends (his

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<sup>237</sup> Testimonies at [www.creationicare.net/2007/05/why\\_i\\_care\\_dan\\_.html](http://www.creationicare.net/2007/05/why_i_care_dan_.html), accessed March 2008.

<sup>238</sup> This question comes from Luke 10:29. Jesus was supposed to have summarized the Christian message as "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10: 27). When asked by a lawyer, "and who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

language). Such skewed domestic priorities affect the global social and political scene. In the end, therefore, according to Cizik, the answer to the question “Who is my neighbor?” must include “the Indians whose lives are being taken away by the rising seas!” (speech at C3 conference, 21 February 2008). The way Cizik framed it, evangelicalism must include the recognition of divinely imposed limits on our own opulence for the sake of the greater good and a sense of “biblical outrage” at the realization that it is consumer markets, and not devotion to God, that drives American culture (quote from Cizik at C3 conference, 21 February 2008). As Joel Hunter wryly put it (quoting Saint Augustine), “He who has a lot of goods has someone else’s goods” (C3 conference, 21 February 2008).<sup>239</sup> To characterize this expanded evangelical moral sensibility, Cizik concluded with the reflection that “We [evangelical leaders] have to have a cosmocentric worldview—not an anthropocentric worldview” (C3 conference, 21 February 2008).

### **Patron Saints of Ecology: Modeling Being (a Better) Human**

The sort of cosmocentrism invoked by Cizik is of a particular type, however. Some academics, according to DeWitt, attempt to trace evangelical environmentalism to leaders such as noted Catholic priest Thomas Berry and related scholars and writers. As DeWitt made clear, the sort of cosmocentrism espoused by Berry (who called himself a *geologian*), or parallel, process-oriented models of divinity, are off-putting to most evangelicals.<sup>240</sup> DeWitt specifically

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<sup>239</sup> Dr. Hunter did refer to Augustine as “Saint Augustine.” I was not able to confirm that this quote came from Augustine, but this was Dr. Hunter’s recollection.

<sup>240</sup> By “process-oriented” I refer to those theologies, such as Berry’s, that were influenced by Alfred North Whitehead’s “process philosophy” (see his *Process and Reality* 1978 [1927]). While Berry does not necessarily declare allegiance to Whitehead’s philosophy, he retains many features of Whitehead’s thought, including the temporally-dependent nature of the divine (God does not “know” the future before it happens), and the consideration that cosmological unfolding is a sacred process. Most directly, however, Berry was influenced by the priest and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whose *Phenomenon of Man* (1959) suggested an evolutionary cosmos with humans at the pinnacle of creation, able to use clarified reason to access a *noosphere*, a transcendent realm where human consciousness could reunite with God. In either case, the sort of divinity implied by the cosmological

cited suggestions made by Berry that Christians ought to “put the Bible on the shelf for twenty years,” or that God was an “emergent property” of cosmological evolution. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim and a number of other scholars who have shaped the emerging field of known as Religion and Ecology are long-standing proponents of Berry’s thought, and in many cases have used it to frame the common quest of the world’s religions toward sustainability. However, the notion that evangelical environmental stewardship follows Berry’s views is offensive to some evangelicals, and according to DeWitt, amounts to “hubris” (interview 8 April 2008).

DeWitt, Hunter, Cizik and others have consciously and carefully begun to provide some color to a different sort of cosmocentric worldview for the evangelical masses through the construction of positive myths and stories that re-imagine the place of the human within the natural matrix, a dependent creature in a “good” world.<sup>241</sup> For example, DeWitt argued in his speeches at the C3 and at the University of Florida (April 2008) that “economy” should be redefined to recognize that the creation (ecology) is the foundation of the economy.<sup>242</sup> Blending scientific classifications with theological concepts DeWitt characterized Jesus as the king of the plant kingdom, the animal kingdom, and the mineral kingdom, and as a teacher who mostly taught on “field trips” (address on 21 February 2008). This blending of evangelicalism and science, however, was nothing new. Evangelicals have long cultivated relationships with scientists as a means to increase their political access.

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model is not one that resonates with most evangelicals, which is DeWitt’s point, and crucial for distinguishing between these different forms of cosmocentrism.

<sup>241</sup> In the Genesis account, after almost every stage of the creation, God declares the work He has done to be “good.” This is a frequently cited passage in eco-theology circles.

<sup>242</sup> The title of his speech at the C3 conference was “Earthkeeping and God’s Love: Biblical Teachings on the Care of Creation.” This point resonates with some economists also. See for example Herman Daly’s “On Economics as a Life Science” and “The Steady-State Economy: Toward a Political Economy of Biophysical Equilibrium and Moral Growth,” both in Daly 1980 [1973].

In 2002 at the “Climate Forum 2002” at Oxford (UK), for example, a meeting of scientists, policy makers and Christian leaders was designed to achieve the “goal,” according to participant Cal DeWitt, of getting “American evangelicals and scientists to see if we could *penetrate* the evangelical community” (interview 8 April 2008).<sup>243</sup> A follow up meeting was held in December 2006 at Melhana Plantation in southern Georgia, resulting in a resolution released on January 17 2007 called “An Urgent Call to Action.”<sup>244</sup> The combined group declared that in their dialogue they “happily discovered far more concordance than any of us had expected, quickly moving beyond dialogue to a shared sense of moral purpose. Important initiatives were already underway on both sides, and when compared they were found to be broadly overlapping.” Beyond this encouraging convergence of aims, the group expressed significant non-anthropocentric sentiment when they argued protecting biological diversity was a “profound moral imperative” which serves “the interests of all humanity as well as the value of the non-human world.”

These environmentally and socially engaged evangelicals have actively worked to separate themselves from, and combat the negative public perceptions of the extreme religious right, who claimed responsibility for G.W. Bush’s victory in the presidential race of 2004. Joel Hunter’s books *Right Wing, Wrong Bird* (2006) and *A New Kind of Conservative* (2008) tried to correct the mistaken conflation of evangelicals with their fundamentalist Christian cousins and spelled out more clearly what it means to witness for Christ in the twenty-first century. Hunter (and Creation Care advocates) focus on “the least of these,” the poorest peoples in the world who

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<sup>243</sup> A press release from the Oxford Climate Forum was available online (<http://www.jri.org.uk/news/statement.htm>) through the John Ray Initiative website (accessed 6 February 2009). The John Ray Initiative is a nonprofit educational organization focused on integrating Christian teachings with scientific knowledge.

<sup>244</sup> The full text is available at <http://www-tc.pbs.org/now/shows/343/letter.pdf>, accessed 12 August 2008. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes in this paragraph are drawn from the full text document available at the PBS website.

stand to bear the greatest part of the increasing biological, emotional and cultural costs of climate change. These evangelicals see their vocation as a new sort of lived witness, acknowledging their moral stance on abortion and end of life issues but focusing their activist and political energies toward advocacy for the poor in marginalized countries, and for a culture change here in the US. As Laushkin imagined his role and that of other evangelicals within sustainability movements,

What we're doing is part of that broader movement [toward sustainability], but each broader movement in American society brings their own perspective to the table, and those perspectives can look quite different to [other] constituency groups.... We [evangelicals] are more conservative overall.... We see our [his and other Creation Care leaders'] role...as being messengers to the conservative part of society.

But this “good news” is not just transmitted among the evangelical leadership, and cosmocentric discourse is not used only to broker partnerships outside the evangelical community. These strategic partnerships and expanded ethical perspectives are also encouraged at the local level, and derive from the grassroots. For example, Tri Robinson, pastor of the Vineyard Church in Boise, Idaho attributed his Christian concern for the environment to an outdoor experience at the age of 16. He recalled “standing on the side of a mountain in California, wondering who God was.” Robinson said that God spoke to him on that mountain, and eventually guided him into the ministry, and although an outdoor peak experience had been deeply formative for him, he did not bring advocacy for the natural world into his ministry for some time (C3 conference, 21 February 2008).<sup>245</sup>

Boise is surrounded by some of the wildest country in the nation, and environmental sentiment runs strong there (whether it is of the more preservationist variety or the deep appreciation for nature that may arise from hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities).

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<sup>245</sup> He stated that he was uncertain how his congregants would respond to what he perceived was an atypical Christian message.

Robinson and his congregants had participated in restoration and other conservation activities, but never under the auspices of the church. After some deep reflection and prayer, and decades removed from the voice on the mountain, Robinson discerned that God required him to bring the message of environmental stewardship from that mountainside into the pulpit.

At that time, Robinson performed three services on Sundays to accommodate all of his worshippers, and on the day he started his earth ministry all three were concerned with creation care. With tears in his eyes, Robinson recalled that it was the only time in his ministry that he had ever had three standing ovations in a row at his sermons. These environmentally-oriented sermons gave rise to more, and the concern for a cosmocentric perspective combined with biblical concern for “the least of these” translated into social activism in Boise. The Vineyard Church has since started an organic garden where members grew over 20,000 pounds of food last year, all of it donated directly to the homeless. A free medical clinic has also appeared on site. “It has changed our church,” Robinson said, “people are touching the heart of God in new ways” (C3 conference, 21 February 2008).

Joel Hunter closed the C3 conference with an admonishment to the gathered church and lay leaders that they it was both a Christian and a democratic duty to speak their values directly into the social policy formation process. His conclusion was forceful, if blunt: “If you follow Jesus, you don’t destroy the earth. Personal change literally saves lives” (21 February 2008).

Personal transformation is particularly important for evangelicals, who also value the individual liberties that accompany capitalism and democracy.<sup>246</sup> But such transformation is not *merely* individual, it always occurs within particular communities of accountability, and often

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<sup>246</sup> Other things, such as end of life issues, abortion, and marriage are not generally considered part of these individual liberties for evangelicals, but rather are issues they perceive to have been decided upon by a higher power.

sets them off from complete identification with what evangelicals perceive to be the dominant secular culture. Though the largest population of Christians in the US, evangelicals envision themselves as out of step with the mores of the masses. Laushkin noted the clash between consumerism (what he perceives to be the focus of American culture generally) and what he imagines the Christian vocation should be, namely a focus on family and community. He further related consumerism to other unhealthy, but uncritically accepted behaviors that permeate our culture. “There are people in L.A. that drive two hours a day to work,” Laushkin told me in mild disbelief. He continued, “From whatever perspective you use, whatever ideology you ascribe to, you’re not going to say, ‘that’s how we were meant to live.’” In a more pensive tone, he then asked, “When was the last time you enjoyed a sunset, you know? It was given to us every day, for our enjoyment” (interview, 13 May 2008).<sup>247</sup>

Stories about what is important, about participation with “others,” and about providing transformational leadership are growing into guiding metaphors for the evolving evangelical Creation Care movement, which itself is a particular theocentric approach that has significant philosophical, ethical, and practical overlap with other facets of the sustainability movement.

### **Northland Church and a Message Distributed**

Many of these evangelical leaders intentionally cultivate partnerships that involve some level of “risk,” recognizing that openness to pluralism is a necessary starting point of social, political and economic negotiation. But many evangelicals reject forms of pluralism that promote moral relativism. My respondents, for example, would feel uncomfortable admitting that their understanding of God, the Creation, and the order of the cosmos was only one among

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<sup>247</sup> As will become clearer in chapters 5 and 6, positive messages, myths, and narratives are more memorable, and more frequently cited by my interview subjects than are the more pessimistic assessments of humans’ place in the natural world.

many views and not in any way “true” or privileged. But one need not endorse metaphysical pluralism in order to recognize that Western cultures are becoming more diverse. These newly developed partnerships involve acceptance of and transparent participation with others, whether at the community, state, national, or international levels. The use of terms such as “cosmocentric” or “theocentric”<sup>248</sup> to describe their theological position, and to advocate for the extension of moral concern to non-human lives and ecosystems recalls for evangelicals the intertwined past and destiny of human and non-human systems. It also focuses attention on the deep relations that bind the world together. Consciousness of these webs of connections are more than a metaphor for some green evangelicals, they are a blueprint.

Northland Church is a “church distributed,” with one mother church (Longwood, FL), three smaller churches in Oviedo, Dora and West Oaks, Florida,<sup>249</sup> and an additional 1200-1500 smaller groups of people joining in via the Internet for every Sunday’s message. One of the “core values” listed in every Sunday’s program is to “reconnect by building relationships.” Joel Hunter’s rationale for the Church Distributed best describes the impetus for the distributed message:

God designed us to work in partnership. Multi-agent partnerships are distributed systems. In fact, most of nature—and most of technology—are distributed systems. On a macrolevel, every ecosystem is a distributed system because each one has interdependent and widely varied components. If even one component of the functional unit we call an ecosystem fails, then everything in that system is affected. On the micro level, the smallest entities of the universe all have interrelated connections. When an elementary particle, the photon, is stimulated an immediate response can be detected in a photon eight miles away. There is no doubt that the universe is connected. Survival in ever-changing

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<sup>248</sup> As a flyer from Tri Robinson’s church puts their theocentric motto, “We do this [advocate for environmental justice] not because of Mother Earth, but because it belongs to Father God” (see [www.letstendthegarden.org](http://www.letstendthegarden.org)). Joel Hunter specifically used the term theocentric to describe the evangelical Christian perspective at the C3 conference.

<sup>249</sup> The other churches are in Oviedo, Dora, and West Oaks, Florida.

environments requires interaction with others. Integration of differences is a key to a hardy life—even in the plant world (Hunter 2007).<sup>250</sup>

In a sort of biomimicry, Hunter suggests that Northland Church is organized according the most successful features of the natural world, namely distributed (and thus resilient) systems that have deeply interdependent partnerships with others.

These groups are doing religious work by forging new individual and community identities (re-focused on ministry to the poor), focusing desire (re-aiming the political energies of congregations), and facilitating a more mindful sort of exchange (in encouraging responsible trade through purchasing). The importance of this last point should not be overlooked when large congregations such as Northland Church gather approximately \$250,000.00 in tithes and offerings each week.

### **Discussion and Evaluation**

First, it is important to highlight the biblical foundations of evangelical creation care, which include a) a theology that declares the creation good, b) the belief that Jesus' physical resurrection illustrates the inclusion of the whole created world in future culmination of the kingdom of God, and c) the idea that these create obligations for humans who are called to rule over the world. Each of these ideas, on its own, would probably not give most evangelicals pause. But increasing numbers are resonating with interpretations of the Bible that integrate these ideas, those pioneered by people such as Richard Cizik and Jim Ball and popularized by preachers such as Joel Hunter. Are the theological foundations of evangelical environmentalism, however, generalizable to mainstream Christian constituencies?

Some central features of evangelicalism are unlikely to be widely adopted within mainstream Protestant denominations, let alone other religious groups. Belief in the literal truth

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<sup>250</sup> Note his invocation of the principle of quantum entanglement, discussed in chapter six.

of the Christian Bible, for example, is an increasingly rare attribute among mainstream Protestants, and it may grow more so as the tenets of evolutionary theory are better understood and communicated to the general public. Even so, this does not mean that biblical literalists will necessarily grow more “liberal” in their understanding and interpretation of Christianity. It is possible that literalism will die out, but an alternative scenario is also possible, in which there is no general decline in the number of believers in the literal truth of the Bible, but rather substantial changes in interpretive methods that continue to find creative (and sometimes paradoxical) ways that science and biblical literalist theology can co-exist. As CI’s Ben Campbell put it, “The trick is in the interpretation of the bible” (interview 29 July 2008).<sup>251</sup>

To illustrate, Joel Hunter’s suggestion that parthenogenesis may be a plausible explanation for how Jesus could have been born without a father provides an implicit endorsement of a naturalistic explanation for an event that, if explained naturally, could compromise the foundation of Christianity. Such apparent paradox is not uncommon in Christianity and conflicting concepts are found in several of the world’s other religious systems also. Campbell’s own recollection of conversations about how evangelical Christians wrestle with the theory of evolution are worth recounting. “The Bible,” he said, “is full of a lot of things.” The stories (as he called them) contained within are non-chronological. Campbell continued,

We falsely believe the Bible as though it’s a 20<sup>th</sup> century, straight narrative, not recognizing some Middle Eastern approaches to storytelling....If I [taking on the perspective of the authors of the Genesis narrative] were talking to a fairly primitive society, and trying to explain to them the process by which the world was created, and the fact that God was involved, how would I do it? Would I talk about something that’s 40 billion years old?...[No,] I would frame it in a timeframe that *they’d* understand. I would show a similar trajectory of God’s involvement, and a *process*. Which if you read the two Genesis narratives, it [the story] follows that [patterns of divine action in history]. More or

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<sup>251</sup> Campbell is an evangelical Christian employed by a secular conservation organization.

less. Our concepts of what we think about in scientific terms, it follows that [suggesting that the Genesis account was parallel to scientific theories of the evolution of the cosmos].

Seven days?<sup>252</sup> Well, I don't have to believe *that* [seven-day creation] to believe that God created the world. And I know people in my home church who say, "well don't you believe in the mature earth theory, that God created everything with a full compliment?"<sup>253</sup>

Well, I don't have to! And it doesn't change my relationship with Jesus Christ. It doesn't change anything about what I think about the importance of the Bible as a narrative of our society and God's role in our understanding of society. If you're going to get hung up on that, honestly, that will be something that will prevent a scientist in our office [CI] from ever even considering Christianity as an option. If that is an obstacle to belief, we are doing a disservice to Christ.

For Campbell, if human interpretations drive people away from the biblical message by, for example, demanding that the creation story refers to a literal seven-day creation, they are not fulfilling their Christian vocation. Yet Campbell and the other evangelicals still contend that they take the Bible to be literal truth. Such paradox does not, however, prevent these Christians from finding in these stories moral guidance.

Campbell's attitude illustrates, as do Randall's and Hunter's nearly identical suggestions that God does not speak with forked tongue, that the interpretation of the Bible may change over time, though the content may be presumed to be unchanging and literally true. Three out of the four evangelical primary informants cited at least one scientist as a personal inspiration for their creation care advocacy (all three cited E.O. Wilson, and two of them cited several others). Other recent joint declarations by evangelicals and scientists have helped to push large proportions of the evangelical population to reconsider their understanding of science. The most common attitude toward science among this interesting group of progressive evangelical assumes that

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<sup>252</sup> Campbell is referring to the account in Genesis where the cosmos was created in six days, with God resting on the seventh.

<sup>253</sup> This refers to the idea that God created a full "compliment" of animals in their present form. This explanation directly challenges the idea of macroevolution, the notion that entirely new species can develop through processes of natural selection.

science is an important and reliable way of gaining knowledge about the world, but that it has very little to say about the content of faith and its moral jurisdiction. Science and religion are, to use the phrase coined by noted biologist Stephen Jay Gould, non-overlapping magisteria (or NOMA).<sup>254</sup> The Protestant understanding of authentic religion as a private and emotional affair is obvious among these evangelicals, who suggest that faith provides the most satisfying explanations at the personal level of understanding, even while acknowledging that science in most cases accurately describes the corporeal world. For some like Randall, attributing environmental activism to obedience to the biblical message rather than to analysis of scientific data makes a stronger case for fighting climate change, for the scientific method is an ongoing process of confirmation and falsification and not the discovery of an objectively real world. If activism flows from commitment to transcendent principles it essentially dodges tough questions about which scientific data is more credible. Though technically speaking a literalist interpretation of the Bible could not coexist with key features of evolutionary theory, including the notion of macroevolution or the emergence of living material from previously inanimate matter, in reality some people resonate with and consider these conflicting perspectives morally relevant.

The perception that it is only evangelicals and fundamentalists who misunderstand science and lobby against its use in the public sphere may be incorrect. While large proportions of the general public believe nature can provide moral guidance and spiritual inspiration (see

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<sup>254</sup> Gould coined the phrase in his book *Rocks of Ages* (1999). For a clever if not altogether convincing critique of this idea see Dawkins' *The God Delusion* (2006: 54-61). Dawkins points out several problems with the NOMA approach, though his primary concern is that Gould is "bending over backwards" paying "lip service" to "completely impartial agnosticism" (2006: 55, 54). Interestingly the crux of Dawkins' argument depends upon a theistic belief in supernatural miracles and an interventionist perspective on divine action. Such an interventionist perspective on divine action does not characterize all, or even most Christians. For a thorough characterization and rejection of an interventionist perspective on divine action, see Robert John Russell's "Special Providence and Genetic Mutation: A New Defense of Theistic Evolution" (1998).

Proctor 2006), about half of the general public (far more than the number of evangelicals in the population) does not connect such reverence for nature with evolutionary science in any personally meaningful way, believing that humans were created in their present form around 10,000 years ago (Holden 2006: 769).<sup>255</sup> Evangelical Christians, like many in the general population, are selective and often contradictory in their endorsement of religious and evolutionary ideas. It seems uncertain, therefore, whether a greater acceptance of Darwinian evolutionary theory would automatically lead to more environmentally benign attitudes, or a reduction in the general number of evangelical Christians.

In any case, though evangelicals have often suggested there is a biological continuity between humans and the rest of creation, their understandings of evolutionary science still typically retain an ontological distinction between human and non-human nature. Created in the image of God, humans are called to exercise a beneficent sort of dominion, later referred to as stewardship. The idea that non-human nature is worthy of respect and possibly even reverence can coexist with strong human exceptionalism provided it is framed within a *theocentric* perspective, one that imagines all value as residing in or deriving from the divine. If a transcendent creator declared the whole creation good and deemed humans rulers of it, then any strong anthropocentrism may be masked by references to a divinely-ordained cosmological order. The elevated place of humans above the rest of creation suggests that evangelical creation

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<sup>255</sup> Holden is referring collectively to a decade or more of research that continues to suggest that close to half of the public has serious doubts about evolutionary theory and agrees with ideas related to a “young earth.” She includes as evidence reports that even college science students do not differ much from the general public, noting studies conducted by Edward Crisp (geology professor at West Virginia University) and James Colbert (biology professor at Iowa State University) who found that about thirty-two percent and twenty-five percent of their students respectively expressed agreement with the idea that humans were created in their present form about 10,000 years ago. Moreover, in a survey after completing the biology class, Colbert found that the numbers declined only to seventeen percent.

care is unlikely, even over the very long term, to develop affinities with dark green spiritualities although they clearly continue to make important contributions to the sustainability milieu.<sup>256</sup>

One seeming contradiction that surfaced as I investigated evangelical creation care was the ontological distinction presently noted between humans and non-human creation. Wilkinson and the Calvin College Fellows begin with the argument that “We simply cannot escape from our embeddedness in nature or nature’s embeddedness in us” (1980: 3), and that “whatever else they are, humans are also *earth*; they share their nature with its soil, its plants, its animals” (1980: 208). Yet the authors later note that *complete* identification of humans with creation is problematic:

such an understanding implies that persons cannot exist apart from their bodies. Yet it seems to be the clear teaching of the New Testament that those who have died, and whose bodies decay, nevertheless continue to exist until the day of resurrection, when they will be clothed with “spiritual bodies.” Thus this portrayal of mind and soul as dependent upon the body would seem to be incorrect (1980: 230).

The relationship between humans and the rest of nature is summed up with an allusion to and play upon the idea of the hypostatic union, which maintains that Jesus is simultaneously fully human and fully divine: “Humans are fully dust, and fully soul; they are soulish dust” (1980: 230).<sup>257</sup> This evangelical perspective, then, preserves a thoroughgoing human exceptionalism even with impassioned pleas for humans to remember that they are part of and dependent upon their ecological matrix.

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<sup>256</sup> Even if many evangelicals are willing to assent to the idea that the creation is inherently good, the source of this good is God, and not nature itself. This marks a break with those who resonate with dark green spiritualities and consider nature-as-sacred, something to which these evangelicals would never assent.

<sup>257</sup> The hypostatic union is a powerful idea precisely *because* it is paradoxical. Similarly, the idea that humans are fully soul and fully dust is counter-intuitive, but partly because of this it is a potent concept. Jesus often taught in parables that were full of paradox, the most obvious example being consistent references to the Kingdom of God, which was already manifesting on earth, and yet still awaiting its fulfillment in the second coming of Jesus (for a popular portrayal and examples of paradox in the parables see Borg 1994: 80-81).

At least in its early manifestations, evangelical environmentalism endorsed a view of Darwinian science that did not necessarily match empirical data. For example, in a statement that strongly resonated with the Gaia hypothesis (offered by biologist James Lovelock), Wilkinson et al. argued that “In the ability to sustain itself over a long period of time, an ecosystem is like an individual organism” (1980: 13). Further, this capacity for self-regulation, it was suggested, had a built-in tendency toward justice and equity, for the follow-up argument deployed by Wilkinson and his collaborators imagines that “starving animals are rare in nature” (13). In such cases, Christians are reading the plot of the “peaceable kingdom,” wherein all creations dwell together in harmony, into a real-life Darwinian drama characterized by predation, death, and often starvation and suffering (see the strong critique of most eco-theology by Sideris 2003).<sup>258</sup> Their embrace of evolutionary science may be incomplete, but this has not prevented their embrace of values central to the sustainability milieu. Although generally anthropocentric in tone (or at best theocentric with a strong human exceptionalism), evangelical advocates of creation care are strong allies, at least in terms of political impacts, in social movements toward sustainability.

### **Further Reflections on Cultural Transmission of a Religious “Virus”**

Every Sunday at Northland Church Dr. Hunter delivers his message to at least 12,000 people, both present in Longwood and through the Internet.<sup>259</sup> From 200 members in 1985 (when Hunter took over as pastor), the church grew so quickly that groups of members began to meet in their own communities, tuning in through the Internet. Aside from the main congregation that now meets in the 160,000 square foot mother church each week, each of the

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<sup>258</sup> For a review of Sideris’ book which suggests that she may be too harsh in her criticism of ecotheologians see Ferre 2003.

<sup>259</sup> When I attended services, those tuning in via the Internet included U.S. servicewomen and men in both Iraq and Afghanistan, viewers in Europe, Mexico, South America, and Canada.

three “satellite” churches now has its own junior pastors, youth groups, singles groups, committees (and so on), and all gather to hear pastor Joel each Sunday, though anyone can watch the services.<sup>260</sup> The “distributed church” began as a practical solution to overcrowding but has become a religious community philosophy:

This is not another church-growth strategy or some let’s-play-nice-together ecumenical effort. It is a connecting strategy that results in spiritual maturity. Christians must intentionally combine in more effective ways to go into the world to present the Gospel and support each other (Hunter 2007).

The distributed church seeks new relationships, cultivates new territory there, and spreads rhizomically. Likewise, the ideas, practices, and values associated with Creation Care and the larger sustainability movement spread through evangelical Christian communities and beyond, carrying with them novel forms encouraged by each encounter. As Joel Hunter said at the Climate Change Conference at Northland in February 2008: “This day is about being equipped for leaders to take this message back to their constituency group. We can make this movement *viral* this way!” His implication was that the church was an effective medium of communication for many who would not otherwise think of making environmentally and socially responsible consumer choices. The church could help “infect” others with similar sets of social and practical norms.

Hunter’s friendships (and in some cases formal partnerships) with Jim Ball (Executive Director of the EEN), Richard Cizik (Vice President for Governmental Affairs for the NAE), and Sally Bingham (Interfaith Power and Light), to name a few, help to shape his moral sensibilities and enhance the strength of his networks. His participation in United Nations-sponsored peace-building processes (for example in Doha in 2007) has provided an international venue for these agglomerated values. Finally, he brings this rich international experience back to Longwood,

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<sup>260</sup> The sermons are archived at [www.northlandchurch.org](http://www.northlandchurch.org).

Florida, and attempts to promote the “greening” of a very large and affluent set of Christians (who have their own networks of Christian friends). The network of leaders discussed above is (as will become evident in later chapters) embedded in even larger networks of participants in global sustainability movements. It is not solely the charismatic leaders of such movements who concoct and distribute these big ideas, nor is it the cultures or organizations themselves that inject ideas into the minds of a passive citizenry. There are “expert networks” (such as the ones described here) that exchange ideas across community borders. Further, there are grassroots programs and organizations that engage the values exchanged at the level of experts, and in turn generate feedback to experts who re-examine, re-formulate, and re-package their own values and those they carry into broader communities of accountability. For example, after Joel Hunter signed the Evangelical Declaration on Climate Change, he requested a full audit of the ecological footprint and energy usage of the sizeable Northland Church. Raymond Randall spearheaded the formation of a committee that generated the audit based on the values outlined by the community leader (which in turn derived from interaction with scientists, lay leaders, and other evangelicals). The audit helped to generate educational material that can be shared with other congregations in an attempt to spread this new form of Christian service in the name of creation. Hunter has used this audit within his expert networks as a concrete example of how he and his church are making positive changes and Northland has also created educational materials to walk other congregations through their own energy and land use audits.

Note the similarity between what is occurring amongst leaders of the evangelical Christian movement and other religious leaders (such as Sally Bingham, and Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim) to the free exchange of conceptual tools and metaphors between oppositional subcultures as postulated in Colin Campbell’s cultic milieu and Taylor’s

environmentalist milieu. The biological metaphor of cultural transmission briefly outlined in Chapter 3 extends the theories of the cultic and environmentalist milieus and provides the possibility of better understanding the processes of cultural transmission.

The relatively rapid and successful spread of the Creation Care theme across a broad segment of evangelical Christians, and its popularity in the U.S. media, is an example of the rapid cultural transmission of a social movement. The leaders interviewed here are participating in the ongoing construction of a set of positive myths that reframe the evangelical identity in terms of ecological and social justice, and thus they contribute in their own unique manner to the metanarrative of sustainability.

CHAPTER 8  
STORIES OF PARTNERSHIP: INTERFAITH EFFORTS TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

**Allowing a Thousand Flowers to Bloom**

Fazlun Khalid, founder and director of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) told me that building a sustainable world was impossible unless the earth's diversity was considered one of its strengths, rather than something to be overcome with a diluted, global ethic. For Khalid, the varied ecological and social crises that confront the globe can only be fruitfully addressed by preserving a diversity of perspectives, actions, and partnerships. Quoting Mao Tse-tung, Khalid said, "I'm for allowing a thousand flowers to bloom! Let people work, make their own solutions from their own beings and their own places....*Solutions* and *places* and *beings* are different" (interview 29 May 2008). In this, Khalid agreed with Martin Palmer, his former employer and the Secretary-General of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) who, when addressing the necessity of plural approaches to achieving sustainability, suggested that any unity of purpose or perspective in sustainability was a fantasy:

It's just not how humanity works. Christianity's been trying to unify everyone for the past 2000 years, communism for the past 200 years, capitalism for the past 100 years. It doesn't work. Why don't we just go with what we know *does* work: pluralism and diversity?— which can often lead to conflict, but *that's an issue of defining what we're saying!*" (interview 27 May 2008).

Palmer's insight is precisely what I have highlighted throughout this study: that sustainability requires clear statements of the goals and deep-seated values of various stakeholders for effective problem solving. "Defining what we are saying" in the case of sustainability depends upon careful elucidation of core values and deep beliefs, whether explicitly religious or not. In a word, the search for sustainability and the partnerships that make it possible depend on pluralism. As Palmer put it, "Pluralism says: 'what is that you bring to the

table that's distinctive, and can I work with that? What do I have to give up?' It's engaging with what fires people. What vision they have" (interview 27 May 2008).

In Chapter 7, I noted that some evangelical witness for the environment is grounded in biblical stories, tactically complex in the formation of partnerships, and intent on ensuring that evangelical goals are not conflated with other environmental activists and their motives whose foundations are not biblical. The focus of that chapter was on groups that derived from a particular religious tradition. This chapter is about groups whose primary purpose has been to bridge the gaps between different religious groups and between religious groups and a variety of secular institutions charged with environmental responsibilities. I focus on the strategies that interfaith advocates and groups use to facilitate and maintain partnerships across faith traditions, and translate these traditions into terms that resonate with secular groups.

Pluralism requires negotiation across boundaries, whether such boundaries are personal, communal, or organizational. To illustrate, I focus in this chapter on input gathered from with leaders of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), and Interfaith Power and Light (IPL).

### **IPL, ARC, and Interfaith Approaches to Building Sustainability**

To better understand how these groups work together toward sustainability it will be helpful to detail the emergence of the two groups that are my focus here. ARC was created through a mandate from a high-ranking international figure, while IPL began at the local level in one activist's attic. Nonetheless, they share some of the same priorities and strategies.

#### **Let There Be Light!: the Emergence of Interfaith Power and Light**

Sally Bingham, founder and Director of Interfaith Power and Light (IPL), recalled that she began her journey toward combating climate change when she was invited to participate as a trustee for the National Defense Fund (NDF), an environmental legal defense group. Her

“awakening,” as she called it, came in 1985 as she listened month after month to the NDF scientists’ detailed descriptions of over-fishing, water pollution, deforestation, coral reef decimation, and by the mid 1980s, climate change. At the time she was a member of the Church of Heavenly Rest in New York City.<sup>261</sup> The more Bingham learned, the more emotionally depressed she grew about what was happening to the earth’s ecosystems, and the more insistent she grew with the clergy at her church. She began to pester them, asking “How can [you] stand there and talk about love, peace and justice and never mention clean air, clean water as a right for people...Not only that, but the intrinsic value of everything God created” (author’s interview, 8 July 2008).<sup>262</sup>

In the late 1980s Bingham and her family moved to San Francisco where she was again struck by her church’s inattentiveness to environmental problems. She recalled that the rector of their new congregation, St. James Episcopal Church, had several sons, one of whom was a river guide.<sup>263</sup> Bingham remembered saying to him, “Your kids are out there river guiding...aren’t they seeing what’s happening? And why don’t you talk about it from the pulpit?” His answer: “Why don’t *you* go to seminary and find out where the disconnect is between what we say we believe, and how we behave?” (interview 8 July 2008).

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<sup>261</sup> This was an Episcopal church founded by a group of veterans in 1865, just after the close of the U.S. Civil War, as a memorial to those who had fallen. The parish was officially established in 1868. See their website for more information at <http://www.heavenlyrest.org/html/mission.html>, accessed 22 December 2008.

<sup>262</sup> Bingham believed that everything possessed intrinsic value, I later learned, because everything had been created by God, and declared to be “good” (see, for example, chapter two of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible). This could be considered a theocentric perspective, possessing strong resonance with the sort of theocentrism advocated by some evangelicals in chapter five. Bingham’s stories, however, suggested that she resonated with a slightly milder form of anthropocentrism, and certainly would not have advocated the retention of the dominion or strong stewardship themes advocated by Schaeffer (1970) or Wilkinson (1980). However, while she uses the term intrinsic value and even expresses sentiments that occasionally border on pantheistic perception, for the most part Bingham frames her environmental advocacy within an anthropocentric Christian perspective.

<sup>263</sup> For more details about St. James Episcopal Church see <http://www.stjamesf.org/> (accessed 20 January 2009).

This was the impetus for Bingham's academic journey. At the age of 45 she enrolled at the University of San Francisco's B.A. program. After completing her degree in Theology and Religious Studies, she enrolled at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, the Episcopal seminary of the Graduate Theological Union, to pursue her Master's of Divinity. She was able to convince the bishop to allow her to organize an "environmental committee" for the fieldwork component of her degree. In 1992, she traveled from church to church within the diocese, drumming up support for this Episcopal group. The end result was a group of 12-14 people who met around Bingham's dining room table on the third Tuesday of each month for five years (interview 8 July 2008).

It was never part of Bingham's plan to be ordained. She resisted ordination even after members of the environmental committee encouraged her repeatedly, arguing that she would need to be ordained to sponsor and vote on environmentally-oriented resolutions at general conventions. Nevertheless attending chapel every morning at seminary, Bingham began to understand the Christian message in a new way: "it was starting to assimilate into who I was as a person, and I had to begin to accept the fact that it was a call, I mean, an honest-to-goodness call" (interview 8 July 2008). This perception of a divine call, however, was not to perform weddings, funerals or fulfill the other usual responsibilities of the clergy. Instead, it focused entirely on "saving creation." She remembers that she "felt so strongly that this [protecting the environment] was the job...really, of anybody who professed a love of God. And we [Christians] had a responsibility, not just the opportunity, but the real responsibility...perhaps obligation is a better word, to be the leaders of the environmental movement" (author's interview, 8 July 2008).

Bingham was finally ordained in 1997, the same year that California deregulated the energy industry, which meant that citizens could purchase their power from any one of a number of providers including renewable power sources. She and a lay Episcopal collaborator began going door to door among the Episcopal churches in California, promoting Christian-based energy stewardship and asking them to buy renewable energy from Green Mountain utility company.<sup>264</sup> In 2000 the Rockefeller Brothers Fund offered Bingham the funds to make a film of her persuasive green energy stump speech and hire a national campaign manager, which resulted in the dissemination of Bingham's message to many more Episcopal churches.<sup>265</sup> The film, titled "Lighten Up," had the desired effect and by 2000 there were approximately 60 Episcopal churches in California buying renewable energy. The same year, however, a major energy crisis hit California, and in an effort to provide consistent power the energy industry was again regulated, which meant that the churches could no longer purchase renewable energy in the same way.

The setback, however, also provided a new opportunity for partnership. Bingham and her supporters created an alliance with the California Council of Churches and broadened the scope of their concern to all Christian groups in California. Bingham recalled that they "were already getting calls from Unitarians and Jews, saying 'can we join this program or is it just for

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<sup>264</sup> Vermont-based Green Mountain is an energy provider that has options for carbon neutral energy purchase. Green Mountain does not appear to have any obvious ties to religious groups or to non-profits generally. They do, however, have an extensive code of ethics available online that refers to their expectation that all employees will act as good "stewards" of the earth, implying a softened anthropocentrism that perhaps intentionally resonates with a generic Christian sentiment (see their website at <http://www.greenmountainpower.com/about/ethics.html>, accessed 20 January 2009).

<sup>265</sup> The mission statement of the Fund states that their goal is "Helping to build a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world." The Rockefeller Brothers Fund was founded by the children of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. in 1940 to combine some of their philanthropic efforts. The major contributions to the Fund came from J.D. Rockefeller, Jr., and from his estate. The Fund did not provide further funding for Interfaith Power and Light following this initial investment. For more information see <http://www.rbf.org/>, accessed 5 February 2009. Interestingly, Steven C. Rockefeller, a descendant, was one of the primary drivers behind the drafting and promotion of the Earth Charter.

Episcopalians?’” (interview 8 July 2008). So in 2001 they adopted a new moniker: Interfaith Power and Light (IPL). Since, Bingham’s work has broadened to involve Muslims, B’hai’s and Mormons, becoming a genuinely interfaith effort. Interfaith Power and Light now has programs in twenty-seven states as well as the District of Colombia.

By 2008, IPL had doubled in size (from around fourteen chapters to twenty-eight), tripled its operating budget, and had a full-time staff of seven people. From conversations around the dining room table to a nationwide advocacy group, and Bingham’s 2008 installment as Canon for Environmental Ministry by the Episcopal Church’s Diocese of California, IPL began with a grassroots initiative and went on to influence diverse faith-based and secular communities; by 2008 about half of the audiences Bingham addressed were secular groups.<sup>266</sup> Their bottom-up approach has been different than the Alliance of Religions and Conservation but both center their work around partnerships that cross faith boundaries, and suggest how important such relationships are to the prospect of sustainable societies.

### **The Glue that Mends the Plate: the Creation of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation**

In 1995, HRH Prince Philip (the husband of the United Kingdom’s monarch Queen Elizabeth II),<sup>267</sup> convened a meeting at Windsor Castle, England, with the world’s major conservation groups and nine world religions to form a group specifically “to link the secular worlds of conservation and ecology with the faith worlds of the major religions.”<sup>268</sup> It was

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<sup>266</sup> In the Episcopal tradition, canon is a title granted to a senior clergy member of high regard, often focused on performing a particular set of tasks for the Church or ministering to a particular group. The Episcopal Church website describes a canon as “a member of the clergy...on a diocesan staff [who] assists the bishop. Members of the clergy and laity have at times been made honorary canons of a cathedral in recognition of significant service or achievement” (see [http://www.episcopalchurch.org/19625\\_13888\\_ENG\\_HTM.htm](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/19625_13888_ENG_HTM.htm), accessed 20 January 2009).

<sup>267</sup> See footnote twenty-six in chapter three for more information (p. 16).

<sup>268</sup> The quote is from the website, [www.arcworld.org/about.asp?pageID=2](http://www.arcworld.org/about.asp?pageID=2), accessed 31 August 2008.

called the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). The first steps toward the genesis of this organization, however, had occurred nearly ten years earlier.

In 1986 the World Wide Fund for Nature, at the time headed by HRH Prince Philip, brought together leaders from five of the world's largest faith traditions and several leading environmentalists to "explore how the world's religions could help in the struggle to save the natural world" (Jensen 1999: 492).<sup>269</sup> Assisi, Italy was chosen as the site for the meeting, which was highly symbolic, as it was home to 13<sup>th</sup> century monk Saint Francis. Francis is well known for his relationships with non-human animals, and was nominated by Lynn White (1967) as the patron saint of ecology (White 1967). The proceedings of the conference a) echoed White's argument that Western and Christian perspectives are largely responsible for the ecological crisis, b) suggested that a significant change in political processes and structures is needed to correct the crisis, and c) argued that epistemologies, cosmologies, and their ethical and behavioral accompaniments which are alternatives to Western worldviews should be valued as instrumental in efforts toward sustainability (see the brief outline of the stated priorities in Chapter 5, pp. 95-96).<sup>270</sup> The WWF, World Bank and the other non-governmental organizations present at this meeting, moreover, explicitly endorsed the idea that there was a significant, positive correlation between biodiversity and cultural diversity. The diversity of perspectives was envisioned as a major strength. According to the ARC's website, the special invitation received by the participants asked them to "Come, proud of your own tradition, but humble enough to learn from others," and pointed out that "this applied as much to the secular environmental groups as it did to the great faiths."<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> The faiths represented there were Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism.

<sup>270</sup> These meetings were the impetus for the Assisi Declaration, which was approved by the participants in 2002.

<sup>271</sup> See [www.arcworld.org/about.asp?pageID=2](http://www.arcworld.org/about.asp?pageID=2), accessed 31 August 2008.

Following the meeting, Prince Philip asked Martin Palmer to take the lead in proactively working with these faith groups, including Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and Jews to promote conservation. Over the next ten years these leaders worked with the five groups from the Assisi meetings, and cultivated relationships with four additional faith groups, Bahai's, Daoists, Jains, and Sikhs.

Prior to the 1995 launch of ARC, each of the faith leaders was invited to elucidate what they believed to be the greatest challenges to their adherents and their faith traditions in the era of globalization. There was consensus on two points: the first was the impact of media and the global reach of communication industries that easily and rapidly disseminated Western values; second was the overwhelming power of Western economic structures such as the World Bank. Thus, the event organizers ensured that the World Bank was present at the birth of the ARC, and since then, World Bank officials have been active partners with the ARC in promoting bio-cultural and religious diversity. Palmer was asked to become the first Secretary by the original Board of Directors, and he has served in that capacity ever since.

By 2000, Shinto and Zoroastrian religious leaders had joined the cause, bringing the total number of religious traditions represented to eleven faiths whose adherents comprise approximately two thirds of the world's population, own around seven percent of the world's habitable land, and hold approximately six to eight percent of the global investment market (Palmer and Finlay 2003: xi). The ARC primarily operates behind the scenes, brokering partnerships between international political bodies. Palmer noted,

Some people say "Well we've never heard of you." And if you read Prince Philip's interview on our website, he makes the point: You never should! It should look as though the most natural thing in the world is that the major religions would work with the major bodies concerned with saving the planet, and preserving habitats. We're the invisible glue that mends the plate (interview 27 May 2008).

Many environmental and social justice activists have long been harshly critical of the World Bank because it was cast as the principle instrument of global biological and cultural simplification. But Palmer has been more charitable, recalling that when the partnership between the World Bank and the ARC began, the World Bank employed more full time ecologists and spent more money on understanding ecology than any conservation group in the world (interview 27 May 2008).<sup>272</sup> While Palmer and others who would later form ARC were forging relationships with the Bank, other groups with whom they worked broke off relations. According to Palmer, some environmentalists felt that working with the World Bank amounted to abetting the enemy. Clearly, sometimes new relationships exact a cost on older partnerships. This is part of the risk of cultivating relationships in a pluralistic world.

### **The Ethics of Risky Partnerships: A Marriage of Inconvenience**

“Partnership is actually about the risk you might change,” Martin Palmer said when discussing how the ARC has been able to effectively bridge gaps between religious and secular groups across the globe. “If you’re not prepared to take that risk and to do so with integrity, we can’t work with you. It’s very much like a marriage in that sense.” He went on to say that many development or conservation oriented groups believed they already had the answers to how to provide development, sustainable agricultural regimes, new political structures (or what-have-you), and merely presented these ready-made answers to peoples from other cultures or backgrounds (interview 27 May 2008). To the extent that they were unwilling to risk changing their pre-existing plans or take the time to hear what problems were most pressing for local residents they were not participating in a sustainable “marriage,” a two-way relationship that

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<sup>272</sup> The employment of environmental economists, ecologists and anthropologists was at least in part due to pressure from NGOs and activist groups that continually highlighted the World Bank’s inability to achieve sustainable development. While the Bank continues to operate with economic considerations as their primary concern, they have at least exhibited some ability to include the perspectives of others, a hopeful sign for Palmer and others.

attended to the stated needs of the “other.” Risky partnerships need not always involve only interactions with cultural others. According to Palmer, interactions with peers and colleagues in the global North also require risky partnerships where people express deep beliefs and core values.

For example, Palmer recalled his brief involvement with Friends of the Earth (FOE), a well-known conservation organization, which entered a tumultuous period when their policy platform and administrative direction were uncertain.<sup>273</sup> The head of the organization decided that the ten division heads would benefit from a retreat where they could work through the emotional obstacles in the way of positive progress toward agreement on a policy platform.

According to Palmer, for the first two days, nothing happened. Negative feelings seemed to dog the participants and almost no progress was made in congeniality let alone policy agreement. Finally, one night, it came out that one of the leaders was a Christian. Once word was out, conversations were jump started, and it turned out that all of them were Christians, and that all of them had ultimately joined FOE *because* of their faith. Not one of them had ever spoken to their co-workers of it until then. But after that night they were able to move forward productively because for the first time they understood *why* their peers were engaged in this particular career path. The foundations of the values that motivated their chosen occupation were laid bare.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Friends of the Earth was founded in 1969 by David Brower (himself no Christian), longtime President of the Sierra Club (see Van Horn and Blackwelder 2005). Brower later left the organization, but Friends of the Earth continued to flourish. It is a multifaceted environmental activist organization, with programs focused on global warming, energy, government and industry and transportation (among others). For more information see <http://www.foe.org/>, accessed 5 February 2009.

<sup>274</sup> Friends of the Earth is not an explicitly Christian organization, nor is it entirely comprised of Christians. Its governance structures are rather decentralized and the constituency diverse.

## Engaging Neighbors

One of the ideas that my informants most frequently noted was the idea that protecting the environment was in an important sense protecting one's self. Fred Kirschenmann, director of the Leopold Center, called it developing our "ecological conscience," drawing directly from Aldo Leopold's insistence that in order to be in an ethical relationship with the land one's moral imagination must include ecological systems. Sally Bingham, Richard Cizik, and others I interviewed voiced a parallel idea when they re-interpreted an important Christian story as illustrating that all cultures including non-humans are neighbors, and that Christians ought to love their neighbors as themselves.<sup>275</sup> Bingham put it this way: "I had a cousin who went off to Vietnam,<sup>276</sup> quite regretfully, who said that when you kill a person, you kill part of yourself...it's that way with the earth, I think. When you harm any part of the earth, you harm yourself. What we're doing now is trying to save ourselves from ourselves." An exploration of the concept of "neighbor" is part of Bingham's usual speech for both faith groups and secular audiences. She attempts to persuade her audiences that the concept should include the next generation, and "people on the other side of the world who are affected by every single thing we do here" (interview 8 July 2008). The expanded meaning of neighbor is a metaphor for expanding the boundaries of morality. In this, it parallels the environmentalist metaphor that describes the actualization of an ecological conscience through an expanded sense of self. Moreover, it seems to be a set of metaphors that can be used across several Christian

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<sup>275</sup> I did not interview Cizik, but at the Creation Care Conference in Longwood, Florida, he asked the audience, who, in today's world, is our "neighbor"? His answer was a story of his visit to the Arctic where he saw Native Americans whose lives were literally being washed away by rising seas. He told those gathered, "This is today's civil rights issue!" (21 February 2008).

<sup>276</sup> She referred to the armed conflict with communist-backed forces in Vietnam. US involvement in the conflict began with the involvement of military advisors in 1950, continued through the commitment of battle units in 1965, and ended in 1973.

constituencies and which also resonate with those (such as Leopold and Seed) who are not Christian. This ability to engage others by finding common stories is, for Palmer, central to moving toward sustainability. He suggested that one central task of his work was “to get religions to remember they’re storytellers, and we get the inspirers of the environmental movement to remember they ought to be poets. Then they can talk. Otherwise, they’re just wearing the armor of their impenetrable language” (interview, 27 May 2008).

Palmer confided that conservationists too often use language that is not meaningful outside of their own in-group. Likewise, religious groups often couch their motivations in terms that are not meaningful for others. Words like sustainability, Palmer noted, are problematic precisely because they can mean so many things to so many different people or groups. They are of little use unless the values that go along with any particular deployment of the term are made explicit. “For example, biodiversity” Palmer argued, “means almost nothing to anybody outside [conservation biology and the biological sciences]....The point is that we use language that people don’t understand. You have to challenge people to use terms that the other side can understand” (interview, 27 May 2008).<sup>277</sup> Palmer went on to say that, when dealing with such “concept-words,” he often asks people to “Show us a poem in which that word has been used....If you can’t show us a poem, then it’s not a word that people love enough that they want to *play* with it. If you can’t show us a poem, it probably means it doesn’t mean anything.” As illustrated in Chapter 6, biodiversity was intentionally coined to gain political and public traction for conservation. It is a word designed to make complex ideas easier to understand. Rather than

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<sup>277</sup> To be fair, biodiversity has arguably had a significant impact on both national environmental policy in the US. It has manifested in international declarations and statements, but these measures typically depend on voluntary compliance (see Takacs 1996). Palmer’s point, I believe, was that while such words may be useful policy devices they do little to inform the moral sensibilities of the typical layperson. Zimmerman (1995 [1998]) has suggested that concepts derived from holistic sciences (he was particularly speaking of quantum mechanics) have little bearing on people’s ethical formations. The extent to which biodiversity and similar terms have shaped public understandings of nature is certainly an empirical question.

teaching people who receive development aid new words to describe ideas already embedded in their religious world model, Palmer suggested that his goal is to draw out and highlight extant values.

### **Walking Between Two Worlds: World Model Interpretation and Sustainability**

According to Palmer, Bingham and others building consensus and making progress on policy issues requires translating value sets and worldviews between different constituencies. Once Episcopal Power and Light became Interfaith Power and Light their first task was to investigate what resources different faith traditions already possessed for promoting beneficent stewardship of creation, and then effectively market these resources to the tradition's participants.<sup>278</sup> Thus, in some cases, IPL representatives were "outsiders" intent on "selling" new interpretations of traditional stories to those "inside" that tradition. Bingham was also able to make a stronger case for reducing energy consumption and making renewable energy choices within her own tradition by noting that other faith leaders and traditions were already making progress. For Bingham, even translation of the IPL message to secular groups (for example, university audiences), is relatively simple: a) quote "experts" in other denominations and religions (i.e., Joel Hunter, the Dalai Lama, the U.S. Catholic bishops) who argue that their tradition demands environmental responsibility (often couched in terms of stewardship); and b) outline what sorts of behaviors should follow from these ecologically-friendly readings of these traditions.<sup>279</sup> For the insiders (those within the particular faith traditions), it is a way of reading the traditional texts in a way that is relevant to contemporary concerns. When broadcast to those

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<sup>278</sup> There has been significant resistance to the idea that specific religious traditions can and should be "mined" to get at the glimmers of "green" that appear when looking through the lenses of ecological concern (see for example [Larson 1989]). I generally agree with such criticisms. Some of the "gems" mined from particular religious traditions do, however, seem to seep into the economy of ideas that feeds the sustainability milieu.

<sup>279</sup> See <http://www.theregenerationproject.org/Resources.htm> for film resources related to various denominations and faiths (accessed 2 September 2008).

outside faith communities the task is to explain why people of faith are legitimately concerned with environmental issues. For Palmer, the task is similar but the groups for whom ARC acts as a translator are large-scale international groups such as the WWF, the World Bank, and the United Nations. Palmer noted, “Because we’re able to speak the language of both sides...we are a trusted mediator” (interview 27 May 2008).

The translation of one group’s values into language that other peoples can understand is a difficult and time consuming task. Beginning with such a slow and unwieldy set of processes is problematic when most conservation and development organizations have project goals, timelines, and budgets which discourage a slow process of community-based engagement. But as John Smith, Director of their Sacred Land Program of ARC said, “The downside is that some projects take longer, but the benefit is a) the people believe that they did it; b) they therefore are much more protective of it” (interview 29 May 2008).<sup>280</sup>

### **The Pitfalls of Partnership**

Smith recalled that many times when ARC proposed a project to local residents their first question was often “who’s going to pay for this?” Smith reported his response was usually the same: “We’re not going to talk about that for the first six months.” Instead, that time was spent learning what each particular stakeholder brought to the table and what they sought to change. Conservation and development, Smith emphasized, can not be a one-size-fits-all solution to what are typically complex contextual problems. In Smith’s experience many organizational participants, though their intentions are good, are not willing or able to undergo such a lengthy courtship period. This is why some partnerships fail.

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<sup>280</sup> Smith noted to me that his job title and description were highly flexible, and in large part depended on the project and the groups with whom he was working. Most of his work, however, fell under the Sacred Land Project. For more information on the Sacred Land Project see [www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org).

Among the problematic relationships they have encountered, both informants from the ARC noted the deeply unsatisfying relationships formed with academics. Palmer remembered the gradual engagement of religious scholars in conservation and development work beginning around 1989. Hans Kung's work advancing a "global ethic" helped to inspire an exhibition on religions and ethics in Washington, DC (Palmer and Finlay 2003). For Palmer, Kung's grand global ethic is "academically interesting, but ultimately irrelevant to the world I work in...that's not what I'm dealing with when I'm in Indonesia working with single mothers running a logging operation according to the Qur'an" (interview 29 May 2008).

While acknowledging that most academics get involved for the right reasons, their strategies are often misguided, according to Fazlun Khalid, head of IFEES. In response to questions about the possibility of such a global ethic, Khalid generally described it as an academic fantasy:

I like small. If it's global somebody's got to control it....So who's going to decide this ethic? We going to have a new global pope for everybody? Maybe Mary [Evelyn Tucker] wants to be the global pope! (laughs).<sup>281</sup> We cannot have academics in Yale, or Harvard, or Oxford or Cambridge or wherever... thinking for the rest of the world (interview 28 May 2008).

The problem with academic approaches, according to some of my informants, is that they are top-down: academics and policy experts decide on a set of global principles, then disseminate them to the masses. The perception is that the values of the people themselves are never vetted, they remain private while the public global ethic extols a diluted set of values. The emphasis in sustainability-oriented work is on publications (for academics) and deliverables (for conservation and development organizations), but this does not account for peoples' motivations, which is the focus of groups like ARC and IPL. Their goal, in a sense, is "allowing the private to become

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<sup>281</sup> He was referring to Mary Evelyn Tucker, one of the leaders of the Forum on Religion and Ecology. Khalid had worked with Tucker on several projects previously, and stated that they were friends.

public again,” providing a venue for people to express their deep seated values and beliefs in the public sphere tied to particular religious or community narratives (Palmer’s wording, interview 29 May 2008). According to Palmer a global ethic is empty of content because it is not significantly tied to particular community narratives, and perpetuates the notion that such particularistic beliefs should remain within the private sphere (see Palmer and Finlay 2003: 17-21).

In such cases, partnerships can sometimes hamper positive progress. Engaging groups with different value preferences and goals is no easy task. The ARC was perhaps the first religious NGO to cultivate a relationship with the World Bank but the partnership was rooted in ARC’s honest rendering of the complicity of the Bank in the destruction of ecosystems and cultures. At ARC’s launch in 1995 at Windsor Castle, one of the Bank’s bureaucrats had given a presentation with the usual statistical and graphical representations of data which prompted a response from ARC’s poet, who was present at the event.<sup>282</sup> The poem read:

Somewhere between Christ and Lucifer  
with your silver-grey hair and your quick, silver tongue,  
as you slide the transparencies over each other,  
Mercurial in the projector’s glow.

And your shadow, as your rapid, polished monologue lulls us  
into believing, into hoping even, beyond the figures  
you skate over like thinning ice,  
smiling, energizing as you  
arabesque and spin and stop dead  
with your hand outstretched to grasp.

And I could, we could all, almost vote for you now  
for the Father of Comfort and Finance and Light,  
making us feel as safe and secure as we need.

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<sup>282</sup> Palmer told me that at the founding event for ARC, and since, he has insisted that both a poet and an artist are present at all ARC events and meetings (interview 27 May 2008). They provide artists’ renderings of the events through their own media.

And it's not that I don't believe you, or see how easy it is  
for us to distrust you.  
Everything you say is right on, and good. It stands.  
It's just...that He is crucified everywhere on earth where you arrive  
with your plans, and panaceas.  
It's just...you can't serve two masters without being bought,  
or sold.<sup>283</sup>

When the bureaucrat refused to allow the poem to be published with the rest of the proceedings under the auspices of the World Bank, the poem circulated via email through World Bank employee networks. Many were astounded at how their organization appeared to others, to outsiders with whom they were attempting to forge partnerships. Palmer reported that the poem “Brought that man down,” and “needed to.” The bureaucrat “had no passion. He had no story. He had no heart. He could only give you statistics.” The man was removed from his post, transferred, and given a less visible position in the Bank. His story ultimately had a happy ending, but according to Palmer, it was because the bureaucrat had recovered the passion that had driven him to this work: “He’s a better man for that but also we were then able to begin working with the World Bank. Because a group that could read that poem, and go, ‘Ah...so, that’s how we seem to some people,’ is open to thinking that, maybe, there are other ways, that there are other stories” (interview 29 May 2008). This story is an example of how costly some partnerships can be, but for Palmer it is also an example of their potential for fostering partnerships that last.

It was at that time rare (at best) for a multilateral development organization to consider poems as a source of data. But in this case, a poem effectively caused a policy shift in one of the world’s most politically insular institutions. According to Palmer, the World Bank employee was living without a “story,” that is, he had no guiding narrative that informed his perception of

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<sup>283</sup> This poem is unpublished. Palmer read it to me from a piece of paper.

his purpose in the world or within his organization. All of my informants, and particularly those involved in the ARC, were excellent story-tellers. It is no coincidence, however, that the leaders in these relatively successful organizations tell good stories. Telling and listening to stories, particularly other peoples' stories, is increasingly cited as the most important ingredient in sustained collaboration, through which security and smart subsistence within habitats can develop.<sup>284</sup>

### **From Partnership to Stories: the Importance of Narrative for Sustainable Collaboration Storytellers All**

According to Martin Palmer and Victoria Finlay, humans interpret their worlds “through stories even if we sometimes like to call them facts” (Palmer and Finlay 2003: 51). The environmental movement in particular retells a series of stories that various participants endorse and recall as authoritative. When these stories draw on metaphors of apocalypse or green utopias, valorize earlier or alternative cultural mores and practices (such as the wisdom of indigenous peoples), and endorse Christ-like visions of Spotted Owls and Polar Bears they are religious (or at least religion-resembling) stories. Oftentimes though, secular groups do not realize that they are manufacturing narratives. The crucial task, according to Palmer, is to help secular groups understand that they are also storytellers. In his eyes, the secular environmental movement “has clothed itself in the garments of religion, [but] claims to be scientific.”

Reflecting on engaging with secular conservation organizations, Palmer stated that

one of the first tasks we've had to do is to help [them] recognize that *they function symbolically, metaphorically, and so to some degree quasi-spiritually*, and that the science bit is pretty much irrelevant. That's not why they're there. And once they get to the point

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<sup>284</sup> There is an extensive literature on this subject from the field of strategic management. A review of this literature is beyond the scope of this study, but see for example Banathy's “Designing Social Systems in a Changing World” (1997), Schwartz's *The Art of the Long View* (1996: 227-248), and Cowan and Todorovic's “Spiral Dynamics: the Layers of Human Values in Strategy” (2000).

that they recognize that they tell stories, then you can introduce them to other groups that tell stories (interview 29 May 2008, emphasis Palmer's).

### **Stories That Don't Inspire: Environmental Apocalypticism and Negative Affect**

Many environmental activists, particularly those whose motivations are primarily religious, shy away from the more negative imagery and argument of the environmental movement. Both ARC employees and Bingham reported that positive stories tend to fare better with audiences but also resonate more with their own sentiments. Most religions have ritual fasts, but they are typically followed by feasts. Some religions have a doctrine of sin, but also deal in forgiveness. Thus, according to ARC, "balancing the need for repentance with the need to party is a central insight into human psychology that the faiths can bring to the environmental and developmental movement" (Palmer and Finlay 2003).

On the other hand, stories that *do not* "work" according to these thought leaders include those that use terror or fear to promote action, or those that eschew democratic solutions in favor of quicker, more authoritarian options. For example, John Smith of ARC stated that most of the conservation organizations he has worked with believed so deeply in their programs that they assumed they had the "right" answers. Beneath the surface, Smith believes, such overconfidence stems from an implicit religious story, derived from "quietly religious attitudes, like 'we are the saviors of the planet.' It [environmentalism] was sort of like a 'new religion'" (interview 29 May 2008).

Palmer recalled that during the question and answer period following a panel in which he had participated, an eminent ecologist insisted that the urgency of the planet's ecological crisis required that humans bypass democratic means of change, that we should "stop nine-tenths of what people are doing and it has to be done, if necessary, by military force" (Palmer's

recollection, interview 28 May 2008).<sup>285</sup> Oftentimes such extreme positions are accompanied by what Palmer termed “Neo-Puritanism.” He meant that some use the ecological crisis as a means of demonstrating their superior moral fiber through abstention from some aspects of Western culture. For example, that scientist later informed Palmer in conversation that he and his wife had vowed never to fly in an airplane again because of the large carbon output. Unfortunately, this well-intentioned act of self-limitation had caused them to miss both their sons’ weddings, and prevented them from ever meeting their grandchildren. In Palmer’s view, the scientist had forgotten “how to party”—the repentance, in this case, did not fit the crime. Palmer recalled an old Jewish proverb he believed was relevant: “On the day of judgment, you’ll be judged—and condemned—for every legitimate pleasure that you could have taken, and did not” (interview 28 May 2008).

For Palmer, negative stories are capable of inspiring fear but not of producing positive change. The environmental movement, said Palmer, cloaks its religious stories behind secular science, and because science is presumed to be value free, it is incapable of providing positive large-scale guiding metaphors. Environmentalism, he said, “can bring us to the moment of crisis, it can bring us to the foot of the cross, it can bring us to Auschwitz, but what it can’t do is take us to the transforming, or transcending experience” (interview 28 May 2008).

### **How to Party, or, Learning How to Dance in the Earthquake: the Power of Positive Narratives**

Palmer and the others at the ARC call these positive stories “wonder-ful” stories—tales which depend on positive messages that inspire not just hope but responsible environmental behavior (Palmer and Finlay 2003). There are narratives in nearly every one of the world

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<sup>285</sup> Palmer did not name this scientist, though following up on hints dropped by Palmer during our conversation I believe that he was referring to Meyer Hillman. Hillman was originally trained in architecture and planning, and in 1970 received an environmental policy-related PhD from the University of Edinburgh. For more information see <http://www.mayerhillman.com/>.

religions that remind people to work hard, but not too hard, and to celebrate what they have, not weep for what is gone (Palmer and Finlay 2003: 23-36). The report from a UNESCO conference on faith-based organizations' contributions to education for sustainability noted that the world's current problems of "overdevelopment and undernourishment, overconsumption and undereducation, overpopulation and underemployment, overmilitarization and undersecurity" are contrary to values that have been upheld by religious communities for thousands of years.

Quoting Rabbi Arthur Waskow, the report's editor stated,

The whole world today is in an earthquake: politics, economics, sexuality... People look for something that isn't quaking... and so they don't pay attention to the state of the Earth. Our calling today, as Rabbi Waskow emphatically put it, is like "learning to dance in an earthquake." This quaking will transform everything, including religions (Pigem 2007: 1-19).

According to Waskow and others, religions are adapting their message to the ecological crisis and one of their primary contributions can be to remind people how to celebrate each other, and life in the midst of these "over-under" crises.

### **"You protect what you love"**

My informants' motivations for engaging in sustainability advocacy were attributed to emotively intense personal experience in nature, or to an intense concern for social equity. Sally Bingham was one of those who traced her environmental awareness to profound childhood experiences in nature. She believed, moreover, that if I were to ask all of my respondents "when was the first time you ever had a sense of the divine, or of something bigger than you are?," I would invariably be told that it had occurred "in nature" (interview 8 July 2008). Her own account of the emergence of her "environmental conscience" is worth retelling:

I used to lie on the ground behind our house....It's not totally country anymore, but 60 years ago it was. We bordered on a stack of property where they had herds of cattle out in the fields. And I would lie on the ground, sort of underneath this willow tree where I'd built a fort, and I had my ear to the ground one day, and I could *hear this earth beating!* I

mean I heard the heartbeat of the earth. And I went, wow, this is *alive*! And I stayed with that for a long time.

And then, when I was older, I realized what I was listening to was cattle in the field...But never mind! For me, it was so real. It gave me this really innate sense that the earth is alive with this beating heart. And of course, people say that now. Carl Sagan said [the earth] is a living species. And so that's been with me all my life. And I did grow up in a place where we played outdoors. With chickens, and dogs and cats, and foxes eating the chickens, and chasing coyote, and you know, that is who I am.

Who's going to protect our parks? Our beautiful wildlife refuges? Who's going to protect those things when my generation is gone? A few people in your [the author's] generation, my children, for example, are nature lovers, and two of them work in the environmental community. But after them, if children want to be indoors playing with electronic toys as a preference over being outside, who's going to love nature? You protect what you love! (interview 8 July 2008).

John Smith told me that his love and respect for place grew out of a deep belief in the importance of social justice, indicating the primacy of the human dimension of sustainability. One story he told illustrated his claim that respectful partnerships comprised of people from widely divergent backgrounds was the key to sustainability. Smith recounted one instance when ARC decided to provide funding to a Buddhist group that had purchased an old building previously used by the Irish Republican Army in an area of town with no "self-esteem."<sup>286</sup> The Buddhists turned the building into a monastery, and constructed a garden in the old building. Though Smith admitted that they never achieved the full scope of what they envisioned, "what went on was enough." The monks turned the facility into an educational establishment, community meeting place, ran a café that promoted healthy lifestyle choices, and brought in students from schools across the region. The director of the monastery was Buddhist by conversion, Smith told me, and still sang in the local Christian church choir every Sunday. "It [the monastery] became the center of economic regeneration in that area," Smith said. Overall,

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<sup>286</sup> The building had bombproof walls in some places and its fortress-like appearance did little to add to the community's esteem.

Smith estimated that they probably spent around one million pounds on the project, a figure he notes as remarkable given the usual budgets of community redevelopment groups: “No authority in the country could spend a million pounds and make such a change! They could spend 10 million and not get the return.” It was particularly interesting because it was not a faith that was native to that part of the world. As Smith put it, “Something quite exotic, and unusual, and completely outside their experience had got people thinking, ‘we are worth something!’” (interview 29 May 2008).

If Bingham’s awareness of “something bigger” first came to her alone in the fields, awareness of accountability can also arise among groups of people who engage each other in novel, and mutually beneficial ways. In these cases, religious beliefs, far from being confined within particular communities, become the primary motivations for engaging with others. Religious metaphor and language are often the primary means of communication between these disparate groups. Follow-up work by the ARC in instances like the one above illustrate that in some cases environmental protection may derive from an expanded sense of self and a moral sensibility that extends the concept of neighbor to include people or groups who hold significantly different worldviews and values. Even to stimulate community-level change, as in the story Smith related, interpersonal interaction is of paramount importance. Smith believes that the most effective way to enact change is one on one with individuals, in discussions of values, priorities and short and long term goals.

Smith, who describes himself as an atheist, told me that these are the sorts of projects that work and that there are more success stories from faith communities than from any other group. These examples alone should make a convincing argument for at least revisiting the arguments of those who, like Norton (2005) would evacuate religion from the public sphere, for in many

cases it is the primary motivation for peoples' engagement in activities that could be considered sustainability advocacy.<sup>287</sup>

### **Islam in action in Zanzibar**

In keeping with the philosophy that solutions to environmental, social and development problems should not be imposed from the outside, ARC and WWF often recruit others to help them fulfill their goals. For example, in a much-celebrated conservation victory, ARC and WWF teamed up with Fazlun Khalid and the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) halt the destruction of the reefs around Zanzibar, endangered because of non-traditional and unsustainable dynamite fishing.

Khalid, whose father is an Islamic theologian, created a set of workbooks with accompanying visual media in the local language (Swahili) detailing Muslim resources that promoted awareness of ecological limits and intergenerational obligations. Khalid's first step was to gather with a group of Qur'anic scholars. He offered the materials with passages of text from the Qur'an and asked them to interpret the text with an eye to the environmental problems prevalent within their communities. According to Khalid, many of these scholars told him, "we read these verses every day, and we've never thought of them that way before!" These religious leaders agreed to help Khalid spread the message to the community fishermen.

With the authority of these community leaders behind him, Khalid engaged the local fishermen in a series of workshops. The workshops were a tremendous success: "The result was that in twenty-four hours they stopped dynamiting the coral reefs. Which CARE International,

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<sup>287</sup> This is certainly not to argue that the inclusion of religious values in the public sphere always leads to environmentally-responsible behaviors or attitudes. Many religious groups strongly resist environmental values. However, sustainable human-habitat interactions are unlikely to develop unless adaptive and empathetic relationships develop among the human populations, the species with the broadest impact upon habitats. Thus, many sustainability advocates, particularly those motivated by social justice, often focus first on this human dimension of sustainability.

which WWF couldn't do for 3-4 years. They just couldn't stop them. In 24 hours, overnight, they stopped dynamiting the coral reefs!" (interview 29 May 2008).<sup>288</sup> In suggesting to these scholars a new interpretation of traditional texts he is assisting with the manufacture of an ecologically-aware Islam, and thus with the manufacture of the meta-narrative of sustainability (interview 29 May 2008).

### **Tending the garden in a tough neighborhood: cultivating love in place**

Smith told of another garden in the middle of a series of high rise flats where only the most desperate people lived. Between these high rises was an old Anglican church with a crumbling school long since abandoned by the church. A friend of Smith's, Reverend Canon David Wyatt, decided that school yard would be a fine spot for a garden, but had no money.<sup>289</sup>

On a walk one day, Wyatt discovered some young men vandalizing a bus stop. Wyatt stopped, observed them for a moment, and asked the boys, "Do you like doing that?"

"Well, yes!" the boys chimed, though puzzled they were not admonished by the older gentleman.

"Come with me," Wyatt said, and they followed him to the old playground. "Do you think you can destroy that?" Wyatt asked the boys, pointing to the abandoned play structures?

The boys, of course, took him up on his offer, gradually tearing down the old bars, pulling out the old concrete, as Wyatt collected and recycled newspapers (long before it was common practice). With the small allowances of money from the newspapers, they built a garden together. Smith told me,

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<sup>288</sup> Care is a non-profit organization founded in 1945 to provide aid to refugee survivors from World War II. It is now one of the world's largest humanitarian organizations, and according to their website ninety percent of their 2007 expenditures were directly targeted at helping women (see <http://www.care.org/>, accessed 7 February 2009).

<sup>289</sup> For more information on Episcopal canons, see footnote 6, this chapter (p. 6).

The outcome of it was: That [the garden] was the catalyst that completely changed that area...when I [Smith] interviewed him [Wyatt], there was actually a waiting list to get into those flats. And the only, you know, real visible change you could see was this garden. It had a nice high wall around it, and it was very much sort of a quiet, open space. He had built the respect at all levels of the community, huge numbers of which had never stepped foot in the church.

Smith used this as an example of grassroots processes that create genuinely sustainable positive outcomes. Even when religion is not specifically the catalyst for positive action, it often provides resources that can facilitate positive community formation (like the old churchyard). When such initiatives work well, Smith concluded, “they work *really* well” (interview 29 May 2008).

Transformational leaders in sustainable partnerships tell such stories to their collaborators and those outside their communities. Part of the reason such stories are often not influential on World Bank and other development and political institutions’ officials is that they do not provide hard data and are infused with ethical and often religious language. Large institutions such as the World Bank, or the five-year plans preferred by the UN, may have concrete goals which are ideal for engaging governments and institutions. But Smith is convinced these strategies are not very effective on the ground (interview 29 May 2008). When Palmer, Smith, and others brought these and other stories to the World Bank for publication in their planned, jointly-published report, the World Bank editors balked, stating that there were not enough “facts” in the stories. As a multi-lateral development institution beholden to a variety of stakeholders, they could only publish facts. Palmer and his colleagues pleaded with them: “that’s not how religions work,” and informed the Bank that if they wanted to genuinely engage with the world’s faith traditions, they were going to have to listen to such stories. Palmer told this story with some satisfaction: “In the end, they passed an editorial decision. That is, according to the World Bank, *myths, legends and tales are facts*. And on that basis, they were able to publish the book” (interview 28

May 2008).<sup>290</sup> By deciding to listen to the stories of some of the world's faiths, the World Bank was also helping to broaden the scope of its own story by raising the possibility that new sorts of information, such as religious narratives, could provide data for normative decision making.

### **Ethics at What Scale?**

The above stories raise significant questions about the scale at which values should be included in deliberations about conservation, development, and sustainability. Smith and Palmer both believe that sustainable partnerships are created when they fit with the values of individuals at the most local level, not when they match the broad agendas of external agencies and organizations. This is part of the rub between NGO employees and the academics they perceive threaten the world's cultural diversity by promoting a common set of foundational ethical principles to guide the world's diverse cultures.

Hans Kung's universal ethic, first articulated in the 1980s and presented at the Parliament of World Religions in 1993, continues to be popular with some religion scholars, and its presentation is still mentioned as a formative event for the field of Religion and Ecology (see for example Tucker 2006: 404; Golliher 1999). Mary Evelyn Tucker, in her survey of the field of in the *Oxford Handbook of Religion* (2006) mentions Kung's contribution as well as the Earth Charter. Tucker and her husband John Grim have made significant contributions to the international dialog on sustainability, providing the most visible link between the academic community concerned with religion and environmental issues and international political bodies such as the United Nations. They launched the Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE) in October of 1998 at a United Nations Press Conference held to report on the series of conferences

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<sup>290</sup> The book was *Faiths in Conservation* (Palmer and Finlay 2003).

at the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) from 1996-1998.<sup>291</sup> Beyond their monthly report of religion and ecology oriented news bites from the UNEP, Tucker and Grim have participated in many other programs. In the published report from a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)-sponsored event at their Catalonia, Spain location (called UNESCOCAT), Tucker is cited no less than half a dozen times, and her idea that there is an “emerging new sensibility” provides the structure for the report (Pigem 2007).<sup>292</sup> “Sustainability,” Tucker suggested, “needs to be placed in a larger, spiritually inspired context that includes the following major elements: 1) planetary awareness; 2) caring for future generations; 3) nurturing bioregional cultures and local knowledge; 4) expanding our ethical horizon; and 5) celebrating life (Pigem 2007: 8).

To some extent, such global ethical formulations act as a religion (Taylor 2009), and in most cases such efforts were criticized by my informants. Ethics cannot be generated from nothing, Palmer argued. They must be grounded in an ethos, and a global ethic necessarily has no common community or life experience in which an ethos could be plausibly grounded. Palmer was especially critical of the Earth Charter: “I don’t know anybody apart from those who promote it who’s even heard of it. I mean, what does it *do* other than state the obvious in a somewhat bland way? People do not do things because they’re the same. They do things because they have something distinctive to give” (interview 28 May 2008). The critics believe that these global ethics schemes basically promote a new, less specific sort of faith without attending to the rich possibilities that the existing faiths already possess for creating positive

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<sup>291</sup> The FORE is a research, education and outreach-focused organization. The conferences hosted by the CSWR included leaders from ten of the world’s global religions, as well as leaders from higher education, economists, scientists, ethicists and policy experts. See <http://fore.research.yale.edu/information/about/index.html> for more information and history (accessed 22 March 2009).

<sup>292</sup> The event was envisioned as “deepening...the global dialogue called for by the Earth Charter” (Pigem 2007: 4).

change (see for example the critiques in Taylor 2009: 185-186).<sup>293</sup> Fazlun Khalid called such ethical systems “mega-ethics,” and argued,

The people don't want an earth religion, they want their own religion. These things are coming from academics....For them [the people], this kind of language would be alien, anathema to their own beings... It's alright as a debating point, which is what the academics like, but...who wants to create another religion? We've got enough religions! (interview 29 May 2009).

Sally Bingham noted that she did not see evidence that people were turning toward a global ethical system but believed that people were finding *within and through* their own traditions new strength, new stories, and new partners.

Interestingly, although these thought leaders disagree about the value of universal minimum standards of earth citizenship and responsibility such as the Earth Charter, they generally agree that the preservation of bioregional and indigenous languages, lifeways, world models and narratives is centrally important to sustainability. So while there is agreement on some ultimate goals, there is some disagreement about the appropriate scale of ethical formulations in an interfaith context. Some believe that different faiths can assent to sets of common principles while others are convinced that any ethic that operates at such broad scales is useless, top-heavy and thus unstable.

If Palmer is correct, and he is well placed to have a good grasp of the prevalence of such ideas in interfaith NGOs, then efforts such as the Earth Charter neither filter down to the typical citizen with whom they work (especially the ARC's partners in the non-industrialized world), nor convince people in leadership roles in sustainability initiatives.<sup>294</sup> The high profile position

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<sup>293</sup> Taylor's assessment (2009) is that the Earth Charter has been important in international elucidations of sustainability. Palmer's comment, however, suggests that while the Earth Charter and similar declarations are important at the international scale, most laypersons (particularly in the developing world) remain unfamiliar with them.

<sup>294</sup> This point is certainly arguable, and furthermore could be empirically verified. This is not to say, however, that is has not

of Tucker and Grim at Yale University's School of Forestry, however, and their working relationship with the UNEP suggest that the Earth Charter's exposure continues to increase, and may become more widely appreciated. Moreover, it is possible that the less doctrinally dependent universe story promoted by Tucker and Grim could appeal to more people, including those (in Europe, for example) who shy away from institutionalized religions in favor of a more personalized form of spirituality.

### **Discussion and Evaluation**

There are three primary and related themes on which I would like to offer further comment. The first is the idea offered above (see pp. 196-198; 168-169) that an expansion of ethical concern is important to sustainability advocacy. The inclusive understanding of who is a "neighbor" (offered by Bingham, Hunter, and Cizik) parallels ideas drawn from scientists and activists also involved in sustainability. For example, recall that the idea that defending the environment is defending one's self was articulated by the deep ecologist John Seed. Clearly the idea of ethical extension has manifested in significant ways in both radical environmental circles as well as among mainstream sustainability advocates and even evangelical circles. But more importantly to my argument here, the extension of moral consideration through stretching the "self" to include others (ethnic, cultural, ethical, or non-human), or through an expanded conception of "neighbor," is an important ingredient of interpersonal empathy. It is the foundation upon which genuine engagement with others begins in these faith and interfaith communities. Ideally, individuals treat themselves and their neighbors with care and respect and demonstrate openness to their ideas and worldviews. It is often difficult to encourage individuals or groups, particularly ones that disagree profoundly on particular issues, to participate together in a way that exposes core values and beliefs, and holds them up for scrutiny. But according to my informants, when it does work, the products are much more sustainable. Progress toward

sustainability is ultimately generated by these “risky” partnerships, where people with differing foundational values work together in their common interest.

Second, the disagreements among my informants regarding the usefulness of a global ethic are worth greater scrutiny. Both sides have made plausible arguments for their cause. But interestingly, this may be an instance where the clarification of terms and motivations could prove helpful. For example, Palmer and Khalid both expressed reluctance about common or global ethics because they have witnessed what they believe to be a significant danger of “green fascism” within environmentalist movements.<sup>295</sup>

DeWitt, on the other hand (in agreement with Kung, Earth Charter supporters, and UNESCOCAT conference participants), explicitly extolled the virtues of a global conservation ethics (interview 8 April 2008). Whatever sort of global ethic UNESCO, the Earth Charter, DeWitt, Kung and Tucker advocate, when unpacked it includes provisions for grounding ethics in local communities, and deliberately attempts to avoid imposition of a one-size-fits all ethic. But this does little to soothe those who resist such global values. Perhaps in part because nearly all attempts at promoting global “green” ethics are permeated with religious language. The UNESCOCAT conference discussed above, which essentially promoted a schematic definition of global sustainability, included in its recommendations to UNESCO that “fostering local knowledge and nurturing local cultures and languages is part...of preserving the ecological integrity of a bioregion,” and that “sustainability and environmental ethics must be place-based rather than universal” (2007: 18). Further, the conference participants believed (along with, according to my interviews, Palmer, Khalid, Bingham, and Laushkin [see Chapter 7]) that “most of the damage to the Earth is done by ‘believers’ in the secular modern worldview, with its

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<sup>295</sup> This is likely, in part at least, due to the influence of Maoist ideas on both Palmer and Khalid and their long-standing concern with social equity and pluralism.

ingrained ‘faith’ in endless economic growth and consumerism” (Pigem 2007: 18).<sup>296</sup> For these critics, this expansionist secular modern worldview is precisely the problem, and a new global ethics cannot provide adequate correction.

Thus, whatever sort of ethic is suggested by the UN, the religious scholars who participate with them (such as Tucker and Grim) and some civil society representatives, it is not intended to be an ethical panacea to be successfully applied everywhere. As Tucker and Grim put it, the FORE volumes then are “not looking for a unified worldview or a single global ethic,” rather they seek a minimum global standard for environmental conduct and believe the affective power of religious rhetoric to be the best means of achieving it (Tucker and Grim 1997: xxiv). They intend to graft this ethic of reverence for life and the cosmos onto existing religious cultural production, not to replace existing traditions wholesale. For example, the UNESCO publication specifically noted that religious traditions are crucial to providing education for sustainable lifeways, and assented to the idea that our culture requires “a reevaluation of our place in the cosmos,” and awareness “that human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature” (Pigem 2007: 11). This universal spirituality of connection and its accompanying kinship ethic is certainly a religious vision, and may be integrated with extant religious narratives, a global civic earth religion, or personalized forms of generic spirituality.

Third, and related to the search for a global ethics is the extent to which the religious themes within ethical discourse reflect the narratives, practices and worldviews of diverse

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<sup>296</sup> For example, Palmer told me that “Secularism itself is an ideology. It seeks to impose one model upon the world, and there is no space for anybody else” (interview 28 May 2008). Laushkin said that consumerism was “the pedestal by which we measure all things, and pointed out “that’s not the Christian message”). He went on to suggest that “You find a lot of the things you can do to, you know, reduce your environmental impact, comport to simple living, you know, having more time for family, and community, things that are more wholesome” (interview 13 May 2008).

peoples. The editors of FORE volumes use as a framework for their project a suggestion attributed to J. Baird Callicott (1994) that scholars and others should “mine the conceptual resources” of the world and traditional religions to generate a global environmental ethics (Tucker and Grim 1997: xxii).<sup>297</sup> There have been significant criticisms of this approach (see Larsen 1989). Such endeavors are often envisioned by critics as erosive of traditional worldviews, diluting or adapting them to such an extent that they lose their distinctiveness.<sup>298</sup> As my discussion of the religious dimensions of sustainability advocacy have demonstrated, however, at the international level there exist resonances between the metaphors deployed by representatives of the world religions, indigenous traditions, NGO advocates, and international political regimes. The convergence of narratives from different groups does not necessarily constitute the imposition of a global ethic. Rather, it reflects, in part, a pragmatic, strategic approach to furthering the aims of particular communities. Many international aid and development organizations focus on raising standards of living (however defined). Conservation groups primarily aim to preserve biodiversity (and more recently, cultural diversity). Indigenous advocacy groups have focused on gaining political voice and retaining traditional land tenure. Each of these groups and their differing aims can be roughly sketched for other groups using the discourse of sustainability.<sup>299</sup> In many cases the language, metaphor and ideas frequently used

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<sup>297</sup> This is from the “Series Foreword” from the FORE volumes. It appears in all of the FORE volumes, but the pagination here is from *Buddhism and Ecology* (1997), the first volume of the series.

<sup>298</sup> They may be imagined as erosive primarily because the cultural inspirations that some scholars utilize either romanticize cultural others as instructive which raises problematic questions about indigenous authenticity, in some cases adjudicated by cultural outsiders. In addition, the idea that culturally marginalized peoples can become politically efficacious to the extent that they become adept at utilizing a language and set of metaphors agreed upon in a public sphere that has typically excluded them is often raised. See Arne Kalland’s “The Religious Environmentalist Paradigm” (2005: 1369-1370) for a good summary of these critiques.

<sup>299</sup> It should still be noted that Tucker and Grim are deeply indebted to Thomas Berry and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (who was a significant influence on Berry). Although Berry’s theology dampened the overtly Christian overtones and rather extreme form of human exceptionalism endorsed by Teilhard, the worldview of both authors is decidedly

by the Forum to describe the reasons why individuals and governments ought to care for bio-cultural diversity are increasingly exercised by indigenous and traditional peoples themselves in international venues. If such a broad spirituality in practice does little to erode existing religious beliefs or practices, and instead promotes bridge-building and collaboration with cultural, ethnic or ethical others then it achieves the same collaborative outcomes aimed at by Palmer, Bingham and others. But even if there is little doubt that these themes are in some way present within world and indigenous religions, little or no research has investigated what these metaphors or themes *mean for those people* (particularly in the case of indigenous or traditional cultures engaged in sustainable development projects).<sup>300</sup> For example, participants within some religiously-inspired grassroots actions may be adopting and adapting sustainability-related concepts for their own political ends, while scholars who analyze them imagine that such values and themes are central to their religious lives. This is a potentially fruitful area of further research.<sup>301</sup>

Although there is some disagreement regarding the appropriate scale for ethics, in any case a distinction should be drawn between metaphors and tropes that work on an international level and those which are efficacious “on the ground.” Even if ideas related to a global ethics are unrelated to the moral reasoning of individuals across the globe, stories of local success are transmitted (through organizations such as CI and ARC) into international political venues where they perform political work. I have only begun to tease out some of the cognitive tools used in

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Western in origin and orientation. Questions remain then about the applicability of a common denominator set of environmental obligations grounded in concepts native to the West.

<sup>300</sup> Although historians and ethnographers have investigated differential interpretations of the same events among Native American and European groups (see for example Barr 2004; Griffiths and Cervantes 1999; Gutierrez 1991, especially pp. 3-141), little scholarly attention has attended to fleshing out differences in understandings of sustainability between different cultures.

<sup>301</sup> Teresa Trusty’s dissertation *The Politics of Representing Nature, Culture, and Conservation in Northwestern Bolivia* (unpublished 2009), recently targeted this question.

these national and international political venues by leaders in civil society segments of sustainability movements. The formation of strategic partnerships based on an ethic of interpersonal empathy and recognition of deep interdependence are common attributes of sustainability advocates, and these are also important themes that are transmitted to other constituencies.<sup>302</sup>

The existence of a global ethic grounded in sustainability is not necessarily fascist or oppressive, but the possibility that it could be so remains.<sup>303</sup> Just as indigenous peoples may adopt and adapt the affective dimensions of sustainability discourse, governmental, corporate or other entities may also adapt it to promote their own ends. A spiritualized global ethic, or what some have pointed to as a global civic religion, may provide a unique opportunity for “greenwashing” on a global scale.<sup>304</sup> While a dark green civic earth religion may not promote the exploitation of resources or other peoples, it may be that a sustainability-oriented civic religion (which contains light green and light brown hues) could have other negative impacts, which I will explore in Chapter 10.

### **Tracing the Lines of Force**

At the close of this chapter, two things should be clear. First, there are many shared metaphors and themes between evangelical communities and the multi-faith groups discussed here. For example, the extension of the concept of “neighbor,” the belief in the importance of

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<sup>302</sup> That these cognitive tools are important among the expert network described here does *not* mean, however, that they are generalizable across populations.

<sup>303</sup> Taylor has argued that dark green environmentalist sentiment, although often viewed as dangerous or harmful, is unlikely to promote oppression, violence or terror (2004, 2009, chapter ten of this work).

<sup>304</sup> “Greenwashing” is a pejorative term used to describe the use (often misuse) of sustainability-related rhetoric to practices that are not actually sustainable. Recent attention to what advocates have referred to as “clean coal” is an excellent example, since many environmentalists maintain that there can be no such thing. For examples of clean coal arguments see <http://www.americaspower.org/The-Facts/77-Percent-Cleaner> (accessed 27 January 2009). This website is sponsored by a coalition of coal-based electricity producers.

including religious discourse in the democratic arena, and the centrality of story and narrative are all common themes. In addition, it is possible to begin to see some of the connective threads between these expert networks. Through these open-ended interviews it was sometimes difficult to establish the origin or direction of transmission of certain ideas, but some of the pathways for transference are apparent.

For example, like some of the evangelicals I interviewed, Bingham cited E.O. Wilson as one of her inspirations. Others she cited as influential on her thinking about the relationship between religion and sustainability included the Union of Concerned Scientists (also cited by at least one evangelical respondent), Al Gore, the poet Mary Oliver, and Mary Evelyn Tucker. Bingham recalled that early in her career as a religious environmental advocate, she was often questioned by evangelical Christians about the rapture and what impact it had on her argument.<sup>305</sup> She called Richard Cizik specifically to ask him how he dealt with such questions among his own constituency. “He was wonderful,” Bingham recalled of their early conversation, “He said that ‘there’s absolutely nothing in scripture that would give you *any* indication that the destruction of our natural resources is going to bring Jesus back any faster. And people who say that are *heretics*.’ So now, when I get that question, I quote him!” (interview 8 July 2008). In his explanation to Bingham, Cizik echoed something that Joel Hunter and Calvin DeWitt both said with different words: any interpretation of Christianity that devalues nature in this way denies the physicality of Jesus’ supposed resurrection and eventual return. Bingham also reported that Joel Hunter was a close confidant, and that they have worked together several times. Bingham has also sent sermons that addressed the concept of natural capitalism to Hunter

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<sup>305</sup> Some Christians believe that near the eschaton (“end of times”) all of the righteous souls will be lifted to Heaven to avoid the fiery fate of the rest of creation. This ascension is called the rapture.

Lovins for her to make editorial suggestions and provide examples.<sup>306</sup> The two are longtime friends, and both reported that Lovins stays with Bingham when in the Bay Area.

Bingham, Palmer, as well as the evangelical informants I interviewed cited their parents and childhood experiences in nature as formative of their ecological conscience. Palmer's father was an Anglican priest, his mother an amateur naturalist responsible for his respect for the environment, and his godmother taught him to read the signs of ancient landscaping (old wells, terraces, etc.) and "how to listen to the wood...and read how it had grown" (interview 28 May 2008). Intellectually, Palmer also listed Shakespeare and Jung, cited his travels as a young man in Hong Kong, and his exposure to Daoism, Buddhism and Maoism as influences. Professionally he has relationships with officials within the World Bank and United Nations. But ARC also declared Bingham's Interfaith Power and Light initiative part of their "Sacred Gifts" program, an award which highlights IPL's significant steps in connecting religious teaching and theology with environmentally responsible practice.<sup>307</sup> Palmer is also working with Ben Campbell of Conservation International's (CI) Faith-Based Outreach initiative to draw up a "handbook" for each of the world's faiths to be used in conjunction with Conservation International projects.<sup>308</sup> Khalid began his conservation work with the ARC, and after founding his own Islamic NGO, has maintained his relationships with groups such as ARC and cultivated new ones with people like Ben Campbell and CI. Campbell is also an evangelical Christian and is a regular speaker and attendee of environmentally-related evangelical conferences and events.

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<sup>306</sup> See chapter nine for more details about Hunter Lovins and her organization Natural Capitalism Solutions.

<sup>307</sup> For more information about the Sacred Gifts program, see <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectId=49>, accessed 21 February 2009.

<sup>308</sup> See chapter nine for more details on Conservation International's faith-based outreach.

These expert networks are well connected, and they depend on their relationships to each other to broaden their own appeal, sharpen the content of their messages, and learn how to fulfill their own particular niches in the sustainability movement. It is important to note that most of these informants still believe the definition of “sustainability” to be unsettled and in most cases unhelpful to their work on the ground because it cannot be operationalized. Their work, however, cultivating partnerships with an eye to ecological and personal limits and devising strategies for how to live within them, fall under the umbrella of the definition I use here. But their reticence to use the term is illustrative of its utility as a heuristic device. This does not mean, however, that it cannot also be utilized as a policy goal in many situations. Indeed, as the following chapters demonstrate, the concept of sustainability is of central importance to many individuals and groups who have direct influence on policy makers.

## CHAPTER 9 THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF SECULAR SUSTAINABILITY

### **Introduction**

In Chapters 7 and 8, values have been couched in broader narratives that place ethical principles, obligations and demands in the setting of a dynamic system, whether ecological, global, or cosmological in scope. The informants and the groups they represent are, for the most part, explicitly religious, and either work from within a particular tradition, or begin from a multi-faith perspective. In all of the cases presented, these activists reach out to those outside their constituencies with large-scale narratives. In this chapter, I review data gathered from high level actors in secular organizations dedicated in some way to the search for sustainability. The similarities between the tactics used by religious, interfaith, and secular groups will be clear. Though the religious dimension of sustainability is perhaps more muted and deep values and beliefs tend to surface further along in negotiations, religious and spiritual leaders are frequently addressed directly as allies by those in the secular sustainability arena. Moreover, at least some of these informants consider themselves to be religious or spiritual but pursue their work through these secular venues, which attests to the fluid and permeable boundaries between religious and secular communities, at least in the United States.

### **Conservation International, Natural Capitalism Solutions, and Northwest Earth Institute**

Each of the organizations that are the focus of this chapter has a unique history and different targets. While they share some similarities in strategy and philosophy, my informants envision their work in very different ways.

#### **Conservation International**

Conservation International (CI) is a large conservation organization dedicated primarily to preserving global biodiversity with a three-pronged strategy of a) describing the importance of

biodiversity (and the dangers of loss) with cutting edge science, b) maintaining an abiding concern for human welfare, and c) facilitating and maintaining partnerships with businesses and non-governmental organizations.<sup>309</sup> Formed in 1987 by a small group of concerned activists, the organization has grown in size and scope, and now maintains field offices and programs in Africa, Asia, North and South America, and Europe. Their focus is on biodiversity “hotspots,” that is, threatened areas where genetic and species variety is especially high (for the time being). Their primary purpose is to provide scientific data to populations to help them design and implement effective conservation strategies. They have cultivated partnerships with businesses such as Citigroup, BP, Chevron Texaco, Cargill, and Conoco Phillips, and a variety of NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), including at least one explicitly religious organization (A Rocha).<sup>310</sup> My focus here, however, will primarily be the Faith-based Outreach Program at CI, which began in 2007.

The Faith-based Outreach Program turned two years old in September of 2008. Ben Campbell was asked to spearhead the program from its inception. Because he was former director of agroforestry for CI before he moved on to work for the Christian relief and development organization Worldvision, he had already established relationships with upper level management within CI.<sup>311</sup> Campbell believed that it was largely because he was open about

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<sup>309</sup> See [http://www.conservation.org/discover/about\\_us/Pages/mission.aspx](http://www.conservation.org/discover/about_us/Pages/mission.aspx) for their mission, and [http://www.conservation.org/discover/about\\_us/Pages/strategy.aspx](http://www.conservation.org/discover/about_us/Pages/strategy.aspx) for their strategy (accessed 8 October 2008).

<sup>310</sup> See [http://www.conservation.org/discover/about\\_us/partners/Pages/partnerslist.aspx](http://www.conservation.org/discover/about_us/partners/Pages/partnerslist.aspx) for CI's list of partners (accessed 8 October 2008). A Rocha, Portuguese for “The Rock,” is an international Christian conservation organization that provides research, community education, ecological advice, and community involvement plans for conservation of threatened habitats and species through eco-tourism or other means. Their first center was a field study center and bird observatory that drew thousands of visitors from across the world. See <http://www.arocha.org/int-en/index.html> for more information about A Rocha (accessed 25 February 2009).

<sup>311</sup> Worldvision is a Christian relief and development agency primarily targeting children and families in underserved areas. Their website claims that 86% of their revenue went directly to relief for children and families in 2007, and that globally they provide relief to over 100 million people in over 100 countries (see <http://www.worldvision.org/home.nsf/index.htm>, accessed 25 February 2009).

being a Christian that CI asked him to direct the new faith-based initiative. CI began to actively pursue their vision for a Faith-based Outreach Program when the “green evangelical” movement began to gain momentum in the United States (see Chapter 7 for more details). News about evangelicals such as Richard Cizik, Joel Hunter and others who were promoting a creation care agenda was pervasive in the United States, and the political power of evangelicals reached across oceans into peace negotiations (such as the ones Hunter participated in at Doha) and missionary work. As Campbell put it, “CI realized here was a whole new group of people they should be talking to, that they didn’t know yet!” (interview, 29 July 2008). The original vision for the program was to tap into the enormous political potential of evangelicals in the United States and secondarily to mobilize churches in the U.S. and worldwide to get more involved in conservation efforts.

CI provides an interesting example of a secular conservation organization that is intentionally reaching out to faith groups in an effort to cultivate new partnerships to promote conservation. While the program was initially envisioned as focusing primarily on evangelicals in the U.S., Campbell noted that it became interfaith, and global, almost immediately, since biodiversity “hotspots” are often in the tropics, places where Christians, Muslims, and other faiths are asked to work together effectively (interview 29 July 2008).

### **Natural Capitalism Solutions**

Hunter Lovins spoke fondly of her mentors Daniella Meadows (lead author of *Limits to Growth* [1972]) and David Brower,<sup>312</sup> noting that one of their most important contributions was to talk freely about values and the “inner dimension” that provides the motivation to work for

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<sup>312</sup> Brower was elected the first Executive Director of the Sierra Club in 1952, serving until his removal in 1967, following which he founded Friends of the Earth (1969) and later the Earth Island Institute (1982) (Van Horn and Blackwelder 2005: 225). He was often referred to as the “Archdruid” of the environmental movement (see McPhee 1971).

sustainability.<sup>313</sup> Unfortunately, Lovins noted, the inner dimension of sustainability has been separated from the technical/scientific dimension in the public sphere, leading to some disconnect for those who pursue sustainability. Although she believes it is important, Lovins does not see her role as rescuing this inner dimension from anonymity. Instead, her approach is thoroughly pragmatic: she tries to meet people where they are. If they want to talk financial bottom line, she begins there. If they talk about values, she talks about those, too. But in many ways, even frank discussions of profitability and common sense require people to analyze what it is that they wish to maximize, and therefore require some reflection on values.

Lovins is perhaps best known for her work with Amory Lovins with whom she collaborated on *Factor Four* (von Weizsacker, A. Lovins and L. Lovins 1997) and *Natural Capitalism* (Hawken, A. Lovins and L. Lovins 1999). But earlier works included two books on nuclear non-proliferation (*Energy/War: Breaking the Nuclear Link: A Prescription for Non-proliferation* [A. Lovins and L.H. Lovins 1981], and *The First Nuclear World War: A Strategy for Preventing Nuclear Wars and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* [O’Heffernan, A. Lovins and L.H. Lovins 1983]), and about creating safe energy for national security. This work was long before widespread realization in the United States that energy scarcity and dependency was a national security issue.

These books were released while Lovins ran a non-profit organization called the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), a think-tank focused on strategic energy solutions.<sup>314</sup> After parting with RMI, Lovins founded Natural Capitalism Solutions (NatCap) in 2003, an organization dedicated to educating senior leaders in business, government and civil society “to restore and

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<sup>313</sup> From roundtable discussion at the University of Florida, September 2007.

<sup>314</sup> Lovins and her then husband Amory founded the RMI in 1982. HL Lovins left the organization in 2003 to found Natural Capitalism Solutions. For more information about the RMI see <http://www.rmi.org/>, accessed 25 February 2009.

enhance the natural and human capital while increasing prosperity and quality of life.”<sup>315</sup>

NatCap provides consultations to corporations such as Royal Dutch Shell, Wal-Mart, and Interface Carpets, and has worked with the U.S. Department of Energy, the Pentagon, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, as well as the governments of Jamaica, Australia, and Afghanistan to help promote change toward sustainability.

NatCap Solutions especially targets what Lovins calls “thought leaders,” high level actors in these various constituencies. These leaders are highly networked individuals, and because they are often also leaders with decision making power in large businesses, educational institutions, and governments, they are well-placed to exact large-scale change.

### **Northwest Earth Institute**

Other groups focus on grassroots efforts, providing individuals with the tools to create change in their personal lives. The Northwest Earth Institute is one of those organizations.

The Northwest Earth Institute (NWEI) was founded in 1993 by the husband and wife team of Jeanne and Dick Roy in Portland, Oregon with a mission to motivate “individuals to examine and transform personal values and habits, to accept responsibility for the earth, and to act on that commitment” (NWEI 2001b: 12). The Roy’s organized a series of what they called “discussion groups” in their home, where participants met once a week to discuss a set of readings. Soon, through word of mouth, literally, the groups began to appear in local churches, homes, and in other communities. According to figures on the website, the NWEI now has over 600 volunteers in all 50 states, plus Puerto Rico, Canada, Sweden, and New Zealand working to disseminate the discussion group model, with over 85,000 enrolled to date ([www.nwei.org/n\\_american\\_network](http://www.nwei.org/n_american_network)).

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<sup>315</sup> See [http://www.natcapsolutions.org/Hunter\\_Lovins.htm](http://www.natcapsolutions.org/Hunter_Lovins.htm), accessed 8 October 2008.

The first discussion group module was called “Exploring Deep Ecology,” and included writings from authors such as Gary Snyder, Aldo Leopold, Arne Naess, Thomas Berry, Matthew Fox, Stephanie Kaza, Brian Swimme, and many others. From there, the NWEI developed modules dedicated to “Voluntary Simplicity,” “Choices for Sustainable Living,” “Discovering a Sense of Place,” “Globalization and its Critics,” “Healthy Children, Healthy Planet,” and most recently a module dedicated to climate change called “Global Warming: Changing CO<sub>2</sub>urse.” Each discussion group compilation includes discussion questions designed to help people examine individual values and practices, build community, and “to take action toward creating a more sustainable future.”<sup>316</sup>

The discussion groups are grounded in the notion that current trends are unsustainable. The Roy’s prefaces explicitly state that they wish to challenge the values of the dominant consumer culture that erode traditional sources of social support that promote healthy living, such as extended families, neighbors, and church communities (NWEI 2007b: 10; 2001a: 10). Some of the ways in which the NWEI endeavors to change personal beliefs and practices compliment the other organizations I have been discussing. While CI focuses on collaborative partnerships with NGOs and businesses, and NatCap Solutions focuses on creating culture change through education of high level actors, NWEI fosters grassroots-level individual changes in values and practices. Despite differences in their foci and strategy, each of these groups is working toward a more sustainable human culture.

### **The “Ecology” of a Social Movement**

Among the varied readings in NWEI’s *Choices for Sustainable Living* module was a short piece by Buddhist scholar and activist Joanna Macy, which suggested that in the early years of

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<sup>316</sup> See [http://www.nwei.org/discussion\\_courses](http://www.nwei.org/discussion_courses), accessed 8 October 2008

the twenty-first century human cultures will begin a new path toward peace, justice and sustainability.<sup>317</sup> She called it “The Great Turning” (NWEI 2007b: 20-22).<sup>318</sup> The switchmen that will set humans upon this new path are the varied social movements that in different but interrelated ways work toward the sustainable society. The Turning is composed of three mutually reinforcing dimensions: a) “holding actions in defense of life on earth,” b) confronting the “structural causes of the global crisis and [creating] sustainable alternatives,” and c) “a shift in our perception of reality” (2007b: 21). The third element, Macy claimed, “is happening all around us...Like our primordial ancestors, we begin to see the world as our body, and, whether we say the word or not, as sacred” (2007b: 21). Public intellectual David Korten authored a book called *The Great Turning* in 2006, and his website has at least two references to Macy’s use of the phrase (one of them the exact quote that appears on the cover of one NWEI discussion guides).<sup>319</sup> His interpretation of the Turning coheres with Macy’s, though it is more complex. Korten repeatedly makes the point in print and in lectures that to change the culture it is necessary to change the *stories* that culture understands as normative. Perceptual shifts are transmitted through culture from the “bottom-up,” in the same way that a self-organizing system generates dynamic equilibrium from a period of release and reorganization phases.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> See chapter four, pp. 18-19 for more discussion of Macy’s work. This piece was not drawn from a prior publication.

<sup>318</sup> Macy suggested that “many activists are using that term now”

<sup>319</sup> Korten’s website describes him as an “author, lecturer, and engaged citizen” (<http://www.davidkorten.org/home>, accessed 25 February 2009). He is often referred to as an economist, but his training was in psychology and behavioral systems. He has achieved the rank of captain in the US Air Force, was a research scientist with the Pentagon, taught at Harvard Business school, was a project manager for the Ford Foundation, a regional development specialist for the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and has been involved in the International Forum on Globalization and helped found the Business Alliance for Local Living Alliances (BALLE) and *YES!* Magazine, whose motto is “Supporting you in a building a just and sustainable world” (<http://www.yesmagazine.org/>, accessed 25 February 2009).

<sup>320</sup> Stories are passed through cultures, Korten believes, and eventually achieve a critical mass when they are accepted by enough of the population. According to systems theory, natural systems undergo a series of changes

Examples of this perceptual shift include “cognitive and perceptual frameworks” (Macy mentions general systems theory, deep ecology, Gaia theory, and the Universe Story, “which are based on discoveries in physics and biology and reveal the radical interconnectedness of all life”), spiritual perspectives from both Eastern and Western “world” religions and from native traditions across the globe, and “new” practices and rituals (NWEI 2007b: 21). This illustrates the pervasiveness of themes introduced to sustainability movements from the life and physical sciences discussed in Chapter 6, and also highlights Macy’s belief that all of these smaller scale movements, which can be envisioned as facets of a broader social movement called sustainability, have a significant religious dimension. Moreover, Macy suggests that these varied movements, from direct action to activities such as New Age-style ritualizing, are working together to “re-make” the world.<sup>321</sup>

Cooperation between these various sub-populations engaged in direct action for the earth, ritualized consciousness-raising, and social justice or anti-globalization resistance may be considered a relatively new phenomenon. Interestingly, while within the cultic and environmentalist milieus disparate groups exchanged motivational metaphors, ideas, and imagery rather freely, direct cooperation occurred (see for example Taylor 1997) but was more often the exception than the rule. For example, deep ecology was often contrasted with “shallow” ecology. The latter was portrayed as mired in anthropocentrism and not sensitive to the spiritual or affective dimensions of species and habitat loss (Naess 1973). Such sentiments were criticized by many scholars (Bookchin 1987; Zimmerman 2000) as potentially fascist and inattentive to the dangers of universalizing discourse.

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commonly labeled *exploitation*, *conservation*, *release*, and *reorganization* (see Gunderson and Holling 2002). This idea coheres with Korten’s and Macy’s idea that we are at a cultural crossroads, a moment of “reorganization.”

<sup>321</sup> Paul Hawken (2007) used the phrase “re-making the world” to suggest, as has Macy, that these movements are cooperating in significant ways.

It was such internecine fighting that prompted Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger to argue in a widely-read article, “The Death of Environmentalism,” that while the environmental movement was an important development in creating legislation and action that has prevented ecological and social collapse, the movement was unable to provide a rich *positive* vision of the future based on common core values (2004).<sup>322</sup> On their account, narrowly-conceived policy goals and infighting ensured that environmentalism remained a marginal movement with few positive outcomes. Note the resonance of their claim with Martin Palmer’s lament (from Chapter 8) that environmentalism can “bring us to the foot of the cross” without offering any “redemption.” Hunter Lovins agrees with Shellenberger and Nordhaus, and while her activist roots lie in the environmental movement (with mentors such as Meadows and Brower), she considers her current work as going beyond environmentalism.<sup>323</sup> Generally speaking environmentalists, she believes, do not work well with others. Lovins uses the term sustainability to describe her work because besides highlighting practices that are unsustainable, it also offers a positive vision of how to work together to make reduce human disruption of ecological systems and increase social capital. She described some of the reasons why activists need to move past environmentalism:

the activist community tends to act like a bucket of crabs. Anytime any one of them starts to gain any elevation, the others just pull ‘em down. And that’s just stupid. And we’ve also—“we” being those who came out of the environmental movement or the social movement—tend to look at any other movement as inferior. So [these] activists tend to

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<sup>322</sup> They disseminated this piece through the internet, and through sustainability and environmentalist networks and listservs. The full text is available online at [www.thebreakthrough.org](http://www.thebreakthrough.org) (accessed 10 October 2008).

<sup>323</sup> “The Death of Environmentalism” argued that the old environmentalist paradigms based on pollution prevention and conservation were inadequate to address environmental issues at the global level, particularly climate change. The old environmentalism needed to die, they believed, before the next phase of sustainable cultural development could ensue. Nordhaus and Shellenberger went on to publish a book called *Break Through* (2007) which began with the death of environmentalism and concluded with what they called “the Politics of Possibility,” an extended attempt to envision a positive political paradigm that included nature as a political entity (not as a background consideration or an object to be protected). Bruno Latour has also argued, albeit for a different and more academic audience, that nature ought to be a political entity (2004).

look at people who are doing spiritual work as somehow irrelevant....[But] there's work enough for all of us (interview 6 August 2008).

Although she does not perceive her work as directly contributory to the religious dimension of sustainability, she has no problem with others finding deep value, even spiritual inspiration in the realization that human production, consumption and population could be stabilized and sustained indefinitely.

During a luncheon and roundtable discussion at the University of Florida in the fall of 2007 Lovins recalled an example of the positive outcomes that derived from cooperation. Randy Hayes and the Rainforest Action Network (RAN), a direct-action organization formed in the mid 1980s that has been calling attention to exploitation of the world's most biologically diverse rainforest habitats and the suffering of their peoples, had boycotted Mitsubishi and through direct action had drawn public attention to their contributions to deforestation.<sup>324</sup> Lovins recalled that Mitsubishi then approached the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI, where Lovins was still employed at the time) and asked them to help end the boycott. On the one hand, Lovins and the RMI team provided some easy-to-implement business ideas for Mitsubishi, small sacrifices for the cessation of a negative public relations campaign. On the other hand, Lovins spoke with her old friend Randy Hayes of RAN (they had worked together as environmental activists with Brower, and elsewhere), and asked them to end the boycott. "It was a nice one-two punch," recalled Lovins. It drove home her main point: "as a movement, we are an ecology. We need all the species [of activism and action]" (September 2007). Lovins played the role of a translator,

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<sup>324</sup> For more information on Randy Hayes and RAN see Hayes's "From Hopiland to the Rainforest Action Network" (2005). Hayes co-founded RAN with Mike Roselle, one of the co-founders of EarthFirst!, another radical environmental organization. Lovins' ability to cooperate with both the corporate entities and relatively radical environmentalists makes her a paradigm case of the new generation of sustainability activists whose allegiances are not bounded by ideologies.

and helped each side achieve what they wanted. Mitsubishi was able to end the boycott, and RAN saw shifts in behavior and policy at a major manufacturer.

Each of the approaches noted by Macy above, direct action, social and environmental justice activism aimed at structural inequities, and advocacy of perceptual or cognitive shifts through ritualizing and spiritual training, what Lovins would call different “species” of advocacy, were present in the Mitsubishi campaign. Just as biodiversity discourse highlights the importance of diversity for the preservation of system resilience, achieving sustainability requires actors who challenge to the status quo, as well as actors who have the ear of the corporations and businesses that are often imagined to be the primary culprits of ecological degradation. “Who is the enemy?” Lovins asked, reflecting on the tendency of environmentalists to simplify the “ecosystem of activism” by shutting out corporations. “Is it business [that’s the enemy]? You know, when you’ve got Wal-Mart driving climate protection into its 90,000 supplier businesses it’s hard to couch them as the enemy” (interview 6 August 2008).

While negative portrayals of corporations such as Wal-Mart by environmentalists have likely contributed to some changes in corporate culture, sustainability advocacy has typically approached such corporations with more positive messages and offers of partnership. In significant ways, sustainability has added a discourse of cooperation to the preexisting environmentalist, social justice, voluntary simplicity and resistance to capitalism discourses, tying them together through the recognition that there is a certain convergence of concerns despite wide general disagreement on the nature and source of the problems, and the ultimate solutions. In short, sustainability is acting as a new metanarrative, a large-scale story that is able to weave together a wide variety of value sets. As in previous chapters, among secular

sustainability activists there are many smaller stories in which these varied value sets are encoded.

### **Stories of Value**

“Americans, and probably everybody really, want three things: prosperity, security and meaning,” confided Hunter Lovins, drawing on David Korten’s work (interview 6 August 2008). One of the major obstacles to achieving these three basic foci of human desire, Lovins says, is that there is no plausible, desirable vision that the whole world can share (public address, University of Florida, September 2007). Instructions on how to achieve these basic desires for prosperity, security and meaning are nearly always couched in stories. The transmission of information through narratives generates affective arousal. Cognitive science research has demonstrated that when people hear stories (particularly from people within their primary communities of accountability), they make inferences about the ideas and cognitive states of the agents in the story and construct meaningful stories that are related to particular emotional states (Atran, Medin and Ross 2005).<sup>325</sup> Stories about what individuals, groups and communities value, then, are important tools that may be adapted and deployed in the quest for sustainability.

For example, Lovins fleshed out her discussion of Korten’s idea by saying, “What the neo-cons have done is to tee up plausible stories [about how] you are personally going to achieve these three things [prosperity, security and meaning]. They may be wrong, but they address them.” On prosperity, said Lovins, the neo-cons say “Don’t give money to the poor, give it to the rich, because they won’t squander it. Maybe untrue. But it’s plausible.” When addressing

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<sup>325</sup> Atran, Medin and Ross draw on Michael Cole for some of this work. Part of Cole’s research that is relevant to this discussion is his idea of *mediated cognition*, which suggests that human minds are formed in and through their interactions with others through a sort of empathetic projection and inference. Cole has suggested that “human psychological processes are acquired in the process of mediating one’s interactions with others and the physical world through culture and its central medium, language. Humans are created in joint, mediated activity” (1998: 292). See also Cole’s “Phylogeny and Cultural History in Ontogeny” (2007).

security, Lovins added, “neo-cons say it’s the individual white male on the big horse, and so we elect people like the Terminator to be governor.<sup>326</sup> And the progressives say, ‘make love not war,’ but not much about how we’re going to stay secure in an insecure world.” When it comes to meaning, perhaps the dimension most obviously relevant to religion, Lovins states that “the neo-cons say ‘my President speaks to God on Friday,’ and the rest of the country says, ‘thank God somebody does.’ The progressives say separate church and state, and are completely unresponsive to [the question of] ‘What is Meaning?’” Lovins’ conclusion is that “until the progressives come up with a plausible set of storylines about how you’re going to achieve prosperity, security and meaning, they’re not going to get a lot of traction” (interview 6 August 2008). Lovins was suggesting that these stories are *cognitive tools* for creating greater sustainability.

Anders Edwards suggested that the “principles” of sustainability are best imagined as stories, or better yet, Songlines (2005). Edwards drew the idea from the Australian Aboriginal use of Songlines, narrative tracks through particular landscapes, passed down orally, slightly different with each telling as new generations add to the understanding of a mythologized landscape. “The principles of sustainability,” stated Edwards “...represent the footprints of the various groups that make up the Sustainability Revolution. Like the Songlines, these statements of principles articulate a group’s values, archive its history, and indicate the future direction of its actions” (2005: 26).<sup>327</sup> Songlines are religious stories and like others (including those tied to sustainability advocacy) they are “deep” narratives that transgress temporal and political

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<sup>326</sup> Lovins is referring to Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of the state of California, who earlier starred in a trilogy of movies as a “terminator” robot from the future sent to kill (and in the sequels, protect) the leaders of human resistance to robot rule in the future. Schwarzenegger was elected Governor in 2002.

<sup>327</sup> Edwards goes on to say that, “Understanding these statements can shed light on the motivations of the groups in the Sustainability Revolution and provide a way of tracking the evolution of their core values over time” (2005: 26-27).

boundaries by trafficking in affectively-oriented protagonists and plotlines. There are biophilic stories, ones drawn from the life sciences, which provide a new set of stories about how and why human ought to preserve biodiversity (see discussion in Chapter 6). Biophilia is actually, as David Orr reminds readers of the NWEI's Deep Ecology module, "a series of choices, the first of which has to do with the conduct of childhood and how the child's imagination is woven into a home place" (2001a: VI-11). For Orr, without profound experiences with nature in childhood, human survival is in question: "We will not enter this new kingdom of sustainability until we allow our children the kind of childhood in which biophilia can put down roots" (2001a: VI-12).<sup>328</sup>

In addition there are cosmophilic stories, which draw on the "Epic of Evolution," a phrase popularized to refer to the awe and reverence for the cosmos engendered by the recognition of its long history of increasing complexity, which contribute to sustainability. The Northwest Earth Institute volumes weave together stories from science (Fritjof Capra, Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, James Lovelock and others, as well as articles depicting quantum mechanics as morally instructive), Native American cultures (Black Elk, Winona LaDuke, Sun Bear, Gary Snyder's reflection on such cultures), as well as teachings from Christian mystics (Meister Eckhardt, Matthew Fox) and Buddhist scholars (Macy and Stephanie Kaza). These are all tied together and imagined as working toward a convergence where the evolution of the universe itself is seen as morally instructive. In a section of one NWEI module entitled "A New Story from Science," Brian Swimme admits in an interview that,

the Epic of Evolution is definitely mythic. But it's...a form of myth that comes along with this mode of inquiry we call empirical or scientific....Within the evolutionary point of view, you realize—holy todelo!—the mind itself is just an expression of the powers of the universe. And then you have that non-dualistic, hand-in-glove realization that Newton

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<sup>328</sup> The selection was drawn from Orr's "The Coming Biophilia Revolution" in his book *Earth in Mind* (1994).

couldn't have and that Darwin enables us to have but that he didn't fully have. (2001a: V-10).<sup>329</sup>

Or, as Lovelock put it,

Ancient belief and modern knowledge have fused emotionally in the awe with which astronauts with their own eyes and we by indirect vision have seen the earth revealed in all its shining beauty against the deep darkness of space....Like a religious belief, it is scientifically untestable and therefore incapable in its own context of further rationalization (NWEI 2001a: II-5).<sup>330</sup>

Each of these stories is a tale that provides a different set of ethical foundations, and thus provides a different perspective on how humans are able to gain access to prosperity, security, and meaning. They are stories about healing the earth and relationships between people. For Paul Hawken, telling this new set of stories “does not require saintliness or a political party. It is not a liberal or conservative activity. It is a sacred act” (Hawken, in NWEI 2007b: 102). These stories explain what is ultimately good (relationship with others, humility regarding the human place in the world, and respect for and preservation of cultural and biological diversity), and what is ultimately unsustainable (short-term vision, stories of domination and oppression, and the idea that humans are bounded, self-interested cost-benefit calculators).

As Lovins noted, these stories are tools, forged for the quest toward sustainability. She told me about her strategy when she gives public talks: “I very consciously address these issues of prosperity, security and meaning, but I do so without calling them out. So I end my talks with pictures of the Lord of the Rings, and Gandalf, which is mythic, good vs. evil, and the role of little people and individuals in tackling the great challenges” (interview 6 August 2008). She relates these affectively rich tales to what she believes are real-life evils: “[and] the evil that I’ve

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<sup>329</sup> The original interview was published in 1997 as “Science as Wisdom: The New Story as a Way Forward,” in a journal called *EarthLight* (26: 10-11, 15, 22) (see Swimme 1997 in bibliography). *EarthLight* is an eco-spirituality journal published in Oakland, California (see <http://www.earthlight.org/index.html>).

<sup>330</sup> The NWEI reader draws the selection from Andrew Dobson’s *The Green Reader* (1991). The original appears in Lovelock (1979: 152, vii, 9-11, 19-20, 25-26).

been talking about throughout the talk is the loss of all major ecosystems on earth, and climate crisis, and peak oil, etc.” (interview 6 August 2008). In a roundtable discussion at the University of Florida Lovins also pointed toward the polar bear as the newest martyr created by the evil, unsustainable facets of society.<sup>331</sup> Polar bears make good icons for sustainability movements because their disappearance illustrates the interdependence of biological life, since localized but widespread human behaviors impact habitats and food sources of the planet’s most remote species.

In NEWI’s Global Warming: Changing CO<sub>2</sub> course module, Lovins’s mentor Donella Meadows contributed a short piece entitled “Polar Bears and Three-Year-Olds on Thin Ice.” There she recalled her friends’ reaction when faced with biologists’ predictions that the polar bear’s demise was immanent: “in response to this news, [Meadows’ friend] did the only appropriate thing. She burst out weeping. ‘What am I going to tell my three-year-old?’ she sobbed. Any of us still in contact with our hearts and souls should be sobbing with her, especially when we consider that the same toxins that are in the bears are in the three-year-old” (NWEI 2007a: 4).

### **Clashing Values: Talking Through and Across Value Structures**

I asked Ben Campbell, head of CI’s Faith-based Initiative, about his impression of the phrase sometimes discussed in evangelical circles (which provided the title for Chapter 7), that participants in the sustainability movement were “walking together separately.” His answer, I believe, is an important lesson in how people within different sectors of the sustainability movement are working together.

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<sup>331</sup> Martin Palmer compared the polar bear to a Christ figure, tactically deployed by environmentalists (interview 27 May 2008).

These informants emphasized that they actively cultivate partnerships *not* because they have similar worldviews, or even because they have found some ethical common ground, but rather precisely because they have been explicit about the differences between them, and have offered up their different worldviews and value sets for scrutiny. They have attempted to engage others recognizing the mutual vulnerability and risk such engagement entails.

Campbell told me that as a Christian, working within an organization that included and interacted with a variety of faiths was challenging both professionally and personally. He recalled that his wife once wondered if his exposure to a multi-faith atmosphere required that he actually endorse Muslim or Buddhist (or other) practices in some way. Campbell's answer was a qualified "no." He recalls telling his wife

Do I believe they're correct? Do I believe in their eschatology? Do I believe their ultimate...what happens in terms of an afterlife, in terms of a belief system? No, but...it is really very much the "walking together separately" concept. I know what motivates them, they know what motivates me, and through our various belief systems [we] have different reasons why we are concerned about the current state of the world right now (interview 29 July 2009).

Campbell noted that because he is rather open about his faith, he is faced with questions from colleagues in the conservation world about his beliefs and from his fellow Christians about the centrality of science to his work. One of the most frequent lines of questioning, he told me, comes from Christians who want to know if he believes that the earth was really created in seven days, with its full compliment of animals.<sup>332</sup> Campbell's answer:

Well, I don't have to [believe in seven day creation]. And it doesn't change my relationship with Jesus Christ. It doesn't change anything about what I think about the importance of the bible as a narrative of our society and God's role in our understanding of society. If you're going to get hung up on that [seven day creation]...honestly, that will be

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<sup>332</sup> A "full compliment" of animals refers to the belief that all of earth's creatures were created as they are today. This idea is a direct challenge to the scientific theory of macroevolution, where an entirely new species evolves from a pre-existing one. Campbell's perception, which was echoed by Hunter and Randall, illustrates the perception among evangelicals that many non-evangelical U.S. citizens have a rather negative portrait of evangelicals, particularly when it comes to science.

something that will prevent a scientist in our office from ever even considering Christianity as an option. If that is an obstacle to belief, we are doing a disservice to Christ (interview 29 July 2008).

Campbell's thoughtful answer emphasizes his belief that many people are driven away from the church precisely because the church has seemed to be anti-scientific and has made little effort to acknowledge and validate peoples' affinities for living things, and broader ecosystems.<sup>333</sup> That is one of the fundamental shortcomings of contemporary Christian churches, in Campbell's view.

Campbell's perspective recognizes that there are features of the biblical narrative that, if taken literally, are problematic for contemporary Christians intent on reaching across religious and political boundaries. He recognizes the theological import and context of such narratives, but still claims to treat the Bible as the literal word of God. His views are consciously formulated with an eye to maintaining relationships with others.

Here there are clear resonances with the notions of development offered by Martin Palmer and John Smith in Chapter 8, where development actually meets the needs of the people receiving aid. They emphasized that conservation and development agencies ought not to assume that peoples' goals and values—their vision of sustainability—are universal. Recall Smith's suggestion that ARC typically spent six months with a particular group before they even spoke about which programs and ideas they wished to fund. Likewise, Campbell noted that he believed spending time with, and understanding the religious beliefs and practices of others was essential to his work: "you have to understand the respective worldview of the religion...how their unique belief system frames how they understand their relationship, not just with other humans, but with nature itself. Unless you can do that, chances are you're speaking at odds to most people" (interview 29 July 2008). Lovins echoed this when she told me that sustainability

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<sup>333</sup> Campbell made this point in his presentation at the C3 conference at Northland Church (23 February 2008).

is not achieved when consultants come in with answers. Rather, they ought to “come in with questions and...sit with, for example, elders in the village, to have a conversation about ‘what is it that you want?’ ‘Is there anything in what I have [skill sets and success stories] that can help you achieve what you want?’” (interview 6 August 2008). The common element here is that none of these thought leaders have the best definition of sustainability, or best set of practices applicable to most situations. Deciding what sustainability ought to be in these cases depends upon what people imagine are the central values that they wish to preserve or sustain within their community into the foreseeable future.<sup>334</sup>

While less attuned to the importance of explicitly religious beliefs and practice to sustainability, Lovins also noted that people respond best when you tell stories (such as the Lord of the Rings narratives) that touch upon deep seated values. For example, she told me that “Americans and Western Europeans tend to value the individual choice, the law of small business, academic freedom, ideas. So a lot of what I talk about [when giving presentations in those places] is within that context.” But she noted that the idea of natural capitalism, which plays upon these largely American and Western European sentiments, when it is exported, must undergo a facelift: “In Serbia, people hated the idea of natural capitalism, because they think that capitalism is the enemy. They had a visceral reaction against capitalism” (interview 6 August 2008). The relatively simple solution, to re-frame natural capital as human well-being, makes a rather profound point that, as Lovins put it, “if you look at what’s driving unsustainability, it is largely, I think, *the absence of these conversations across values structures*” (interview 6 August 2008, emphasis added). In at least a limited way this talk across value structures is occurring

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<sup>334</sup> Keep in mind that each individual is not accountable to just one community, but rather is involved in a variable set of nested communities, and thus each individual’s vision of sustainability is likely to be couched in a narrative that somehow weaves together the values of these different communities.

within environmentalist movements, but the sustainability milieu includes additional stakeholders, increasing not only the frequency but the complexity of conceptual and practical transmission across these borders.

### **Sustainability for a Global Community**

Values clash and must be negotiated within and between personal and professional lives, and larger communities of accountability such as religious groups. The importance of acquiring the language necessary to speak across these value systems is especially important in world characterized by rapidly contracting spatial and temporal scales. If Lovins is correct, and the failure to talk across these value structures is the primary driver of unsustainability, then the partnerships that individuals and groups form in order to generate change are pivotal because they provide linkages that facilitate communication across these value structures.

Lovins made her comment above regarding conversations across value structures in the context of the tenuous relationship between the United States and Near and Middle Eastern nations. She noted her perception that “the U.S. is now blowing over a billion dollars every day and a half in part trying to secure access to oil, but even more so, for a neo-crusade against Islam.” Meanwhile, “theologians in Islam are trying to destroy the Western ideology. That sort of battle needs to become a conversation...talking with people whose religious underpinning is different than the predominant one in the West. There are sincere value differences, but shooting each other isn’t solving it at all” (interview 6 August 2008).

Such conversations often begin through the high level actors that are the focus of this study, who are highly motivated to promote cooperation, are in the unique position of having access to and understanding of two or more sets of community values, and can effectively play the role of a translator between individuals or groups. But their longevity and effectiveness depend upon the partnerships they are able to cultivate and sustain. Brian Campbell told me that

when he has been responsible for international projects, while he may engage to some extent with the religious leaders in that place, he does not talk to them specifically about their religious values. “I would never presume to go out and talk about the Qur’an in Indonesia,” Campbell told me frankly. He continued,

if I were going to talk to Muslims, I wouldn’t go myself, I’d find a partner with whom I share, let’s say, a concern about conservation...our partner in Indonesia is IFEES...Fazlun is one of our main contacts. I would actually work for Fazlun...[and] basically, he would know what parts of the Qur’an to appeal to in making the case for Muslims (interview 29 July 2008).

Perhaps such relationships require interlocutors, translators or go-betweens precisely because such risky relationships require trust. The best intentions do not automatically overcome a lack of trust. Unfortunately, in many cases, partnerships are difficult to create and sustain precisely because international level negotiations and policy making rarely proceed on the basis of trust. For example, Lovins was attempting to act as a “translator” at a United Nations sponsored meeting just days before the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali, describing in detail her successes in local re-development work in Afghanistan to international governmental officials.<sup>335</sup> She and others working in India had built what she believed was a solid case for the proliferation of village-based technologies, and for re-thinking energy production from the bottom-up. After two days of presentations, she recalled that the Pakistani diplomat stated simply “we’re just going to burn coal. We need to develop and you can’t tell us not to” (Lovins’s recollection during our interview 6 August 2008).

Lovins exclaimed, “Have you not been listening? If what you want is development, you’ll get it better, faster, cheaper through these sorts of technologies [village-scale energy

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<sup>335</sup> The UN Conference Climate Change Conference took place 3-14 December 2007, and was envisioned as an effort to the work of the Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto Protocol, proposed by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, a product of the Rio Earth Summit) was approved in 1997 and went into effect in 2005. The Protocol, signed by 184 countries, creates binding targets for thirty-seven industrialized nations for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction (see [http://unfccc.int/kyoto\\_protocol/items/2830.php](http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php), accessed 6 March 2009).

production] than you will through using last century's technologies." His reply: "I don't trust you." He then proceeded to point in sequence to the others sitting around the room, saying "I don't trust you, and I don't trust you, and I don't trust you...[across the room]." Lovins recalled responding with vehemence:

Tell a Colorado cowgirl you don't trust her you better be ready for a fight! 'Cause frankly, we're either all in this together, and the world's going to solve this problem, or there's going to be winners and losers. And frankly, bud, you're going to be a loser! Me? I'm rich, I live in Colorado. You want warming? Bring it on, we'll have oceanfront property. In Pakistan the glaciers are melting: you're not going to have water. Growth zones are shifting: you're not going to have agriculture. Your country's going to dry up and blow away and frankly I don't give a damn! (interview 6 August 2008).

Lovins may have been unduly provocative but her point is a good one. She had exposed his distrust by making clear what conflict resolution specialists call the "best alternative to negotiated agreement." If the scientists who describe and predict global climate change are acknowledged as authoritative then their claim that developing countries such as Pakistan and others whose economies are shifting rapidly will bear the brunt of change must be given credence also. Lovins and those like her, who live relatively insulated from the dangers of climate change clearly have different reasons for engaging in such international discourse, different motivations, and in a very real sense Lovins' near term survival does not depend as much on these negotiations as do the citizens in nation states to whom translators such as Lovins are trying to market strategies and technologies for sustainability.

Campbell also noted that appreciating pluralism does not necessarily mean that he does not challenge different people to think critically about their faith and its relationship to conservation. Campbell was involved in a project in Bali, for example, focused on sea turtle conservation. Sea turtles have long been harvested by the local population for religious ceremonies. At the time, however, the turtles had been over-harvested and their numbers were on the verge of extinction. Campbell recalled that one of his colleagues gathered thirty-seven Hindu

theologians and asked them to go back to their sacred writings and look at whether “bringing a species to the brink of extinction [was] a value held by Hinduism” (interview 29 July 2008). The theologians reviewed their own writings, and parallel to Khalid’s recollection of how religious leaders inspired by re-reading their sacred texts with a new set of ecologically-informed lenses halted the destruction of Zanzibar’s reef structures, these Hindus adapted their ceremonies to crises within their habitat. Campbell told me,

They were forced to go back and look at their own texts...their own belief system...they [their religious myths] *are stories that form peoples’ value systems, and how they view their relationships with the world.* Now there’s almost no trafficking of sea turtles, there’s almost no sea turtles in ceremonies that are sacrificed. Instead they’ve developed a bit of a ceremony where they find sea turtles on the beach, they turn them around and help them get back out to sea. And there’s another ceremony blessing of the earth. That was done exclusively by them, we didn’t ask them to hold these ceremonies...[it represents] *a re-discovery of their own deep values* (interview 29 July 2008, italics mine).

The sea turtle might have been driven to extinction without the intervention of this external NGO. These new interpretations of the same religious texts also did not come without prompting. NGOs clearly have a pivotal role in the emerging quest for sustainability, as institutional actors that act to translate the concerns of different constituencies in respectful ways (at least ideally). In a way, one of the tasks of these NGOs in cases like the ones above is to generate something like what Berkes, Folke and Colding called for when they suggested that sustainability requires the development of contemporary versions of “taboos” and “social sanctions” (1998: 430). These non-governmental bodies are helping to provide the impetus for the creation of internal sanctions and the pursuit of behaviors and perceptual frameworks that are beneficial to the persistence of people in their habitats, and promote the aims of conservation and development organizations.

## **Marketing the Myth of Sustainability: Prosperity, Security and Meaning**

If, as Korten and Lovins have argued, generating widespread acceptance of the quest for sustainability depends on linking it to human desires for prosperity, security and meaning, then references to these desires should repeatedly bubble up when people advocate sustainability. The religious dimension of sustainability is perhaps less apparent, or less frequently invoked when discussing the economic arguments for sustainability (which are central to the ideas of prosperity and security), though talk of values is often present. There are several organizations and groups that begin sustainability dialog with these practical economic arguments.

### **Economic Arguments for Sustainability**

It may have become easier to make a convincing case for sustainability within the business sector than anywhere else. If so, this is ironic because many of those in the environmental movement, one of the significant tributaries to sustainability, pin the blame for environmental degradation on capitalist mentality generally and corporate entities in particular. But the popular persuasive power of the term sustainability has recently prompted even businesses that have little or no understanding of what the word means to adopt sustainability plans and clauses in their mission statements. Lovins recalled several examples of businesses that are “going green” in order to “make more green.” She cited a major whiskey distillery controlling 40% of the global spirits market, and Wal-Mart, as two examples of organizations where positive change driven by the integration of a values-based perspective is occurring, though they continue to maintain competitive market share. Marketing sustainability as economic good sense does not typically require deep discussion of stakeholder values. In some sense, it is the hook that brings people to the negotiating table with others, so that deeper work toward long-term relationships can occur. As Lovins put it, “In what we do, we don’t lead with values...until someone we’re working with raises that, I won’t” (interview 6 August 2008). For Lovins and others, making the economic

case for sustainability can be a gateway for understanding other dimensions of sustainability, including the importance of social equity and justice, the apprehension of interconnectedness and the adoption of practices that reflect it.

### **Environmental Justice and Sustainability**

“Markets were never intended to take care of grandchildren,” Lovins told me. Indeed, as Lovins and her collaborator Bob Willard argued one evening at a speaking engagement in Gainesville, the current form of capitalism is unsustainable, and by most projections future generations will have a less stable and secure world.<sup>336</sup> Markets can certainly be effective in the facilitation of technology transfer from the industrialized to the developing world, dissemination of public health education, monitoring and fulfilling consumer demand, and reducing the material throughputs required to sustain the economy. Markets cannot (and should not be expected to) act as formulators of values, as exemplars of future ideal social states, or moral frameworks.

The symptoms of the failure of our current economic system cited by sustainability advocates such as Willard and Lovins center around the increasing frequency of encounter between human populations and their markets and ecological limits (i.e., water scarcity, the collapse of global fisheries, the increase in green house gas emissions, the disappearance of reefs, the fragmentation and simplification of terrestrial habitats), and the consequences tend to affect the poorest members of the global community first, and most. The inability of most of the

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<sup>336</sup> Willard spent thirty-four years as a top executive at IBM and has combined his business background with his interest in sustainability. He is the author of *The Next Sustainability Wave: Building Boardroom Buy-in* (2005). Willard’s argument is that, in the business and industrial sectors, sustainability is no longer merely a reaction to market pressures nor relegated to passionate individuals who single-handedly implement new corporate cultures within existing organizations. Rather, in Willard’s view, sustainability in business and industry is driven by an increasingly solid business case for sustainability coupled with shifting consumer attitudes, creating an ideal opportunity to couple increasing standards of living globally with good business sense.

world's cultures to access and utilize these markets to facilitate their movement out of harm's way illustrates the limitations of the market when it comes to solving social issues.

"In the long run," Lovins said over lunch, "Malthus was right. It's just a question of how much human misery we want in the interim" (roundtable discussion, University of Florida, November 2007). It was this realization that the world was changing, that human societies were exceeding their carrying capacities, and that the poor were bearing the brunt of that change that contributed to the emergence of environmental justice movements related to sustainability. Ben Campbell told me that he came to conservation and development work largely because of a strong interest in protecting human rights. It was his concern for human rights that led him to understand environmental issues as centrally related to social justice. "It's kinda funny," he told me, "Christianity is layered over a deeper value system for the environment. I've found...that they're not at odds" (interview 29 July 2008).<sup>337</sup>

While CI attends to the justice component of development, its work occurs primarily overseas. However, environmental justice does not only concern marginalized peoples on other continents. NWEI's climate change module includes a selection from Van Jones' contribution to *Orion* magazine detailing some of the justice issues brought to the surface in the wake of hurricane Katrina.<sup>338</sup> Jones suggests that "in the new century, the only way to survive will be to help each other more—and judge each other less" (NWEI 2007a: 10). The editors of *Orion* suggested that those who lived in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, the hardest hit by the storm, were the first North American refugees of climate change, and that "we're all neighbors of New Orleans now" (reprinted in NWEI 2007a: 9). Jones suggests that the best metaphor for

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<sup>337</sup> Campbell told me he was an environmentalist before he accepted Christ as an adult, so he was an environmentalist before he was an evangelical.

<sup>338</sup> The original version of this article appeared in *Orion* in the 2006 September/October issue. Van Jones is a well-known sustainability and social justice activist.

how humans ought to journey into the uncertain future may well come from the biblical story of Noah, who in the midst of an increasingly chaotic world, had a simple aim: “their [Noah and his family’s] aim was...to survive together, while protecting as many family members and fellow species as they could” (NWEI 2007: 10).<sup>339</sup>

Certainly the federal response to natural disasters within our borders is a matter of national security, for miscalculated or feebly executed response plans erode confidence in government, and create vulnerabilities in national infrastructure. In addition, attentiveness to social equity and justice, not just abroad but domestically, is important if the United States is to live up to the mandates expressed in the Constitution, and if it intends to become again one of the global standards for participatory politics. Environmental justice, as one dimension of sustainability, is often tied to religious imagery or commitments, and crucially related to fulfilling the needs tied to security and meaning.

### **Sustainability as a Sacred Duty**

In *Blessed Unrest* (2007) Paul Hawken poses a question to the reader:

It has been said that we cannot save our planet unless human kind undergoes a widespread spiritual and religious awakening. In other words, fixes won’t fix unless we fix our souls as well. So let’s ask ourselves this question: Would we recognize a worldwide spiritual awakening if we saw one? Or let me put the question another way: What if there is already in place a large-scale spiritual awakening and we are simply not recognizing it?

He goes on to discuss the “Axial Age,” an era when many of the “world religions” were born in a relatively compact region in a short span of time (see for example Armstrong 2007).<sup>340</sup> Hawken

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<sup>339</sup> By “family members” Jones was not referring merely to immediate family, but rather to whole communities of people who depend on each other for their well-being. He earlier states that “In the new century, the only way to survive will be to help each other more—and judge each other less” (NWEI 2007: 10). Jones is referring to something akin to the long-standing idea of “mutual aid,” first popularized by anarchist prince and philosopher Peter Kropotkin (2008 [1902]).

<sup>340</sup> The phrase Axial Age was first deployed by Karl Jaspers to refer to the period between 900 BCE and 200 BCE, during which such important figures as Socrates, Elijah, Siddhartha, Confucius, and Lao-Tzu lived. Karen

suggests that there is a sort of Axial Age is currently emerging, whose first birth pains are the formation of a massive, fluid, and loosely interconnected set of movements that Hawken refers to collectively as “the largest movement in the world.”<sup>341</sup> Hawken argued that “at the core of all organizations [involved in the movement] are two principles, albeit unstated: first is the Golden Rule; second is the sacredness of all life, whether it be a creature, child, or culture” (2007: 186).

Such pronouncements clearly draw on religious imagery. Armstrong’s project has been critiqued by Russell McCutcheon, who stated that “comparative religion practiced in this manner is more akin to a theology of religious pluralism than the academic study of religion” (1997: 105; see also 123). Hawken’s project might be critiqued on similar grounds, for his assumption that there exists some essential feature (or set of features) that is definitive of sustainability illustrates that he is promoting the set of values that he would like to see sustained over the long term. If Armstrong (according to McCutcheon, like Eliade and Otto before her) is advancing a theology of religious pluralism, then Hawken might be said to be advancing a theology of sustainability that has a particular set of goals related to defending particular values. As demographer James Proctor and religion scholar Evan Berry and their collaborators have illustrated, environmental behaviors are more strongly correlated with political affiliations than with religious commitments (Berry and Proctor 2005). The use of religious imagery and metaphor then is certainly religious, but it is also, particularly in cases related to environmental issues, more than likely also political.

When I participated in one of NWEI’s discussion circles in Gainesville, the facilitator for our group, a long time veteran of the discussion group model, began the first meeting with the

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Armstrong’s narrative suggests that many of the world religions arose out of the socio-political matrix of that region and time and are basically context-specific enactments of a universal human religious experience.

<sup>341</sup> This is from the subtitle to the book, *How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being, and why No One Saw It Coming* (2007).

declaration that “What unites us is our inner sense of disquiet, and a ‘love’ for the earth” (spring 2005). The idea that life is sacred is woven into many of the NWEI modules, particularly the Exploring Deep Ecology book. One of Paul Hawken’s articles, amended for the Choices for Sustainable Living book, concludes by stating that “Inspiration...resides in humanity’s willingness to restore, redress, reform, recover, reimagine, and reconsider. Healing the wounds of the Earth and its people does not require saintliness or a political party. It is not a liberal or conservative activity. It is a sacred act” (NWEI 2007b: 102).<sup>342</sup>

Nancy Johnston, head of Operations and Logistics for NatCap Solutions reminded me that “The third principle of natural capitalism is actually ‘being restorative,’ and looking at what it takes to manage everything so that it can be prosperous in the future. And that’s [also about] waking up in the morning and feeling good about yourself, not having more money in the bank” (interview 6 August 2008). She meant that sustainability drove home the point for her that *prosperity* (in the financial sense of the word) was not necessary to achieving a *meaningful* life. But her cultivation of what she believed to be a meaningful life also provided her with new resources for re-imagining what it meant to be prosperous, and for her, this was a sacred realization. Expressing her understanding of the importance of my study, she told me that:

I understand that religion is a part of...this. In some ways...having a sustainable lifestyle can become a sort of religion. To me, religion is a lifestyle. Sustainability is a lifestyle. There’s a lot of crossover there, in terms of what it is you value most. If what it is I value most is eating peas out of my garden, and that means I work all day on Sunday to harvest peas, then isn’t that religion? (interview 6 August 2008).

These examples only briefly illustrate that even among leaders from just three secular NGOs, religious imagery, language, and ideation is prevalent. Many describe “the Great Turning” (as Macy called it), or a paradigm shift that leads humans to more humbly and

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<sup>342</sup> This selection was drawn from an article entitled “To Remake the World” in *Orion* magazine (June/July 2007).

respectfully engage with the nonhuman world, to act more mindfully, in short to consider all actions sacred ones. Extending the scope of analysis to the broader secular manifestations of sustainability would probably yield similar results, though this is certainly an area that would be fruitful for further study.

The idea that everyday, mundane life can be filled with spiritual acts is an important ingredient in many facets of sustainability movements. Likewise, the notion that doing even small things to help reduce individual ecological footprints has motivated large cross sections of the population. Social scientific studies have demonstrated that environmental concern and behavior in the United States are strongly correlated with nature religion, with nature religion defined as agreement with the idea that nature serves as the sacred locus (Proctor and Berry 2005). Even among individuals who would not consider nature itself sacred, many still consider their everyday consumption choices to be related to their spiritual well-being. For example the name LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) has emerged to refer to a powerful purchasing sector in the American economy. This primarily middle and upper middle class demographic is now the primary target audience and consumer set of dozens of magazines, housing and automobile innovations, and clothing and food options. For these segments of the population, such media and material culture is often focused on spiritual practices such as yoga, meditation, organic or vegetarian food choices, natural fiber clothing, and alternative fuel and lifestyle choices.

These acts of voluntary simplicity, then, parallel the “sacred acts” of resistance and protest to consumer cultures and prevailing socio-political arrangements. This analysis lends support to earlier studies which illustrate that focal themes, and motivational metaphors and imagery may cross these political and economic boundaries, and in many cases reinforce each

other (Gerlach 1970; Campbell 1972; Taylor 2009). Moreover, the idea that humans have a sacred duty or responsibility to act cooperatively helps to contribute to two of Lovins' primary needs—the importance of meaning (by finding the sacred in the mundane) and prosperity (often by providing new visions of “the good life”).

The NWEI volumes, for example, often include writings from both of these subsets of U.S. culture. Many of the NWEI books present readings, poems, or perspectives from American Indians which emphasize that attentiveness to every act cultivates a sort of spiritual awareness that is important for the sustainability transition. The climate change module, for example, includes a poem from the Hopi Elders: “Gather yourselves. Banish the word struggle from your attitude and vocabulary. / All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration. / We are the ones we have been waiting for” (2007a: 40).<sup>343</sup>

### **Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Sustainability**

It is not uncommon for scholars to devise a model of knowledge seeking and acquisition that imagines two modes of science: an abstract or Western tradition, and indigenous or traditional knowledge. The Western tradition is described by the modern scientific method, while indigenous traditions are often defined by the development of place-based practices. As noted in Chapter 6 (pp. 138-139), in *Earth's Insights* (1994) J. Baird Callicott, following analysis of a variety of environmental ethics “from the Mediterranean to the Australian Outback,” proposed a “postmodern ecological paradigm” that would unite these varied traditional epistemologies and perceptions with Western sciences such as the “new physics” and “new ecology.” Callicott's idea is that, shorn of their metaphysical baggage, many of the religious beliefs and practices he analyzed might work together toward sustainability. Perhaps ironically,

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<sup>343</sup> This is a poem included in the volume attributed simply to “the Hopi Elders.”

it is science that has finally provided the conceptual framework through which industrialized nations can include indigenous cultures in search of a just and sustainable social order.

Expressing some resonance with Callicott's claims, ecologist Fikret Berkes has suggested that purely Western notions such as wilderness could not be the basis of a cross-cultural environmental ethic. Instead, he argued that "more promising is the notion of *sustainability*," proceeding to quote from an important document co-authored by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) called *Caring for the Earth* (1991). This remarkable document explicitly stated that its aim was to "secure a widespread and deeply held commitment to a new ethic, the ethic for sustainable living" (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1991: 3), which included empowering people to take care of their own habitats and creating "change in personal attitudes and practices" (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1991 : 11). Further, *Caring for the Earth* endorsed in no uncertain terms the idea that the nonhuman world has intrinsic value: "Every life form warrants respect independently of its worth to people" (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1991: 14). The document called for further action to cultivate relationships with religious groups and leaders, encourage the emphasis within these religious traditions on environmentally and socially responsible teachings and behaviors (15), and connected these aims with greater attentiveness to the needs of the world's indigenous peoples (61). This schematic for a global ethics is, according to Berkes, the best chance for generating a social scientific research program that might lead to sustainable communities.

According to several cultural anthropologists, indigenous and traditional peoples are of utmost importance in creating sustainable relationships with the natural world. For, as Berkes argued, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) can provide a bridge between Western science

and traditional lifeways. Berkes argued that certain ideas, such as “Leopold’s land ethics, deep ecology, Gaia, topophilia/love of land, sense of place, bioregionalism, and biophilia/love of living beings, have explored the personal meaning and sacred dimensions of ecology that have been missing in scientific ecology” (1999: 183).

Berkes and others suggest that ecological management based on traditional ecological knowledge is highly adaptable, and as such, tends to be more sustainable than Western management regimes, which are rigid and miss important features of ecosystems.<sup>344</sup> Adaptive management is one place where some scholars claim there can be a mutually beneficial engagement of Western and traditional ecological knowledge (Berkes 1999; Berkes, Folke and Colding 1998). For Berkes, Folke and Colding the *resilience* of ecological and social systems is the key to sustainability in a dynamic and highly interactive world. The preservation of cultural diversity, then, is important because it provides a greater number of examples of how human cultures have adapted to social-ecological dynamics over time, and thus a greater cache of strategies from which to draw when imagining how to persist within habitats (Berkes and Folke 1998: 21-22). Indeed, Berkes, Folke and Colding suggest that contemporary versions of “rituals, taboos, and social and religious sanctions” may be necessary for the industrial world if sustainability is to become a realistic possibility (1998: 430).

In at least three ways indigenous and traditional cultures are important contributors to the religious dimension of sustainability. First, the emergence of international indigenous resistance to globalization and capital accumulation (see for example the discussion on pp. 83-85), and the resurgence of a North American Indian resistance movement beginning in the late 1960s (with

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<sup>344</sup> The fields of ethnobotany (Schultes 1979; Schultes and Von Reis 2008 [1995]), ethnoecology (Posey et al. 1984) have long histories and pioneered the theories and methods later expanded by scholars such as Berkes. The intentional blending of indigenous lifeways with the science of adaptive ecosystem management specifically, however, emerged in the 1990s.

the occupation of Alcatraz and the second standoff with federal agents at Wounded Knee)<sup>345</sup> were important ingredients in the counter-hegemonic dimension of sustainability.<sup>346</sup> Second, indigenous cultures and the anthropologists who advocate for them have become instrumental in the development of the social dimension of sustainability within the mainstream, international political scene. United Nations declarations and World Bank programs now not only include, but often focus on empowering local communities rather than imposing pre-fabricated programs onto communities with specific needs and circumstances. Third, indigenous and traditional cultures have been spiritually instructive for many within the broad range of sustainability movements. It is often said that indigenous cultures have a common perception that all of life, even mundane activities, are in some sense sacred (Posey 1999: 4, 450; 2004: 64, 196-197).

As noted above, however (pp. 137-140), Posey's work, although undertaken with the best intentions, incorporated his own ideas about sustainable resource management into his observations of other cultures. While Posey suggested that the peoples he studied had a deep spiritual attachment to their land and thus conserved and in some cases increased its diversity, later research has suggested that the people he discussed are more pragmatists than conservationists. They use (and abuse) terms such as sustainability just those in the industrialized world might, and they do so intentionally with their own aims in mind. Typically, moreover, such aims have to do more with material security and gain than with some imagined harmonious relationship with habitats. Although such romanticized perceptions are overly broad (Krech 1999), they are frequently championed by sustainability advocates. For example, Paul

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<sup>345</sup> See Deloria's *God is Red* (1992: 9, 21-22) for further discussion.

<sup>346</sup> Jennifer Sumner claims that this counter-hegemonic component is one of the three primary foundations of sustainability, along with dialogue and life values (2005: 112).

Hawken put it this way: “The quiet hub of the new movement—its heart and soul—is indigenous culture” (2007: 22).<sup>347</sup>

These ideas, idealized or not, are impacting the sustainability milieu in significant ways, from grassroots advocacy to mainstream political bodies. According to such argumentation, the preservation of traditional cultures contributes to the resilience (and thus security) of the global community and through increasing trust and interaction across these plural values structures and epistemologies, to the fulfillment of the search for meaning (Korten and Lovins’s third important feature of sustainability).

### **Is the Secular Sustainability Movement Really Religious?**

David Korten and Hunter Lovins may be correct: sustainability may ultimately be about the ability to provide for prosperity, security, and meaning over the long term. If that is the case, however, then it should be clear that the religious dimension of sustainability is integrally involved in producing feelings of security, fulfilling the search for meaning, and answering the question of what it means to be prosperous. The examples above are drawn from secular non-governmental organizations, yet they make use of and contribute to the religious dimension of sustainability. They pose the question: are secular sustainability movements religious?

There are some themes that are common throughout sustainability movements that are not explicitly religious but are deeply affective and tug on core values because they raise questions about the future: what sort of world do people want to grow old in, and more importantly, what sort of world would they leave for future generations? In most cultures, these questions are answered by reference to spiritual norms or religious stories. When secular sustainability organizations ask such questions, oftentimes they are not explicitly religious.

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<sup>347</sup> For a response to Krech’s argument see Deloria 2000.

However, when they ask these hard questions they help to manufacture a highly affective mode of transmitting the metanarrative of sustainability, and this highly affective mode of communication will inevitably be tied to religion somewhere within the web of relations that support these organizations.

The NWEI readers represent one grassroots example of this mode of transmission, asking deep questions about the purpose of human life, and questions about what it means to pursue “the good life” over the long term. The global climate change module includes a partial transcript of a speech given at the 1992 Earth Summit by twelve year old Severn Suzuki (daughter of well-known sustainability advocate and author David Suzuki). Her theme resonates with Donella Meadows’ question about what her friend ought to tell her three-year old about polar bears. Suzuki told the delegation “I have dreamed of seeing the great herds of wild animals, jungles and rainforests full of birds and butterflies, but now I wonder if they will even exist for my children to see” (2007a: 54). She continued, “Parents should be able to comfort their children by saying ‘Everything’s going to be all right,’... ‘We’re doing the best we can’....But I don’t think you can say that to us anymore....My dad always says, ‘You are what you do, not what you say.’

“Well, what you do makes me cry at night” (NWEI 2007: 54).<sup>348</sup>

The United Nations represents the most obvious example of a mainstream international political body that asks similar questions, and drawing on biophilic and cosmophilic themes, deploys spiritual language and imagery to promote the global ethic they believe is required to achieve global sustainability. The Interfaith Partnership for the Environment (IPE) was founded

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<sup>348</sup> Suzuki’s speech was given in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Suzuki was twelve years old. The speech was reprinted earlier in a chapter titled “A World Restored” in David Brower and Steve Chappel’s *Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run* (1995).

in 1986, and dedicated to “working to bring together the forces of religion and ecology.”<sup>349</sup> In the late 1980s they began promoting an “Environmental Sabbath” day each year. In 1990, one poem from the Environmental Sabbath, published by the UN, illustrates well how secular organizations spiritualize sustainability advocacy. In an early section titled “Prayer of Awareness,” the poem stated,

Today we know of the energy that moves all things: the oneness of existence, the diversity and uniqueness of every moment of creation, every shape and form, the attraction, the allurements, the fascination that all things have for one another

Humbled by our knowledge, chastened by surprising revelations, with awe and reverence we come before the mystery of life.<sup>350</sup>

Note the idea that all things have a “fascination” for one another (a biophilia), the use of the term “creation” which is in many respects a religiously inspired reference to the cosmos, and the invocation of “the mystery of life” before which humans are called to be humbled.

The “Prayer of Sorrow,” later in the poem, employs a call and response pattern, with respondents repeating between stanzas, “We have forgotten who we are.” This is a profound statement about the mistakes in the moral anthropology that guided the modern world. The question of “who we are” is a meta-question that calls attention to the range of future options particular groups hope to leave for later generations, and how they endeavor to live well and meaningfully in the present. The “Prayer of Gratitude” which followed provided a reminder of “who we are,” stating “We live in all things/All things live in us.” Along with the closing stanza, “We are full of the grace of creation.../we rejoice in all life,” these lines state with clarity the

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<sup>349</sup> See <http://www.nyo.unep.org/ifp.htm>, accessed 19 October 2008.

<sup>350</sup> This poem is from “Only One Earth,” a United Nations Environment Programme publication for “Environmental Sabbath/Earth Rest Day,” June 1990. The U.N. website suggests that the text will be available shortly (<http://www.nyo.unep.org/ifp.htm>). In the meantime I was able to find the text online at EarthMinistry.com ([http://www.earthministry.org/Congregations/UN\\_Sabbath.htm](http://www.earthministry.org/Congregations/UN_Sabbath.htm)) (accessed 3 October 2008). Earth Ministry is a non-profit organization based in the Puget Sound area dedicated to promoting sustainable lifestyles and decisions for congregations and individuals.

themes of deep interconnectivity that have been noted within environmental subcultures (Taylor 1995; 2009), and in Chapter 5 of this study. These narratives of relationality and cosmic affinity are one of the foundations for sustainability movements, and the strategic use of such themes within secular sustainability-oriented groups is no less spiritual than their invocation in religious groups.

To answer the question posed above—are secular sustainability movements religious?—the answer is a qualified “yes.” While they are not *all about religion* they are certainly utilizing religious metaphor and imagery, and calling for a reassessment of the meta-objectives of particular cultural groups. They are not examples of what Saler might call “prototypical” religions. However, they are both analogically related to religious movements (that is, they *resemble* more prototypical religions), and genealogically related to religious beliefs and practices (which is to say that that religious groups and movements have contributed to the present shape of secular sustainability movements).<sup>351</sup> They have an amazing variety of features that are themselves at least quasi-religious, implicitly religious, or related to explicitly religious values, and when deployed in public venues they are doing political and religious work. The definition of religion provided in Chapter 2, then, is central to the task of discerning the prevalence of the religious dimensions of secular sustainability organizations and groups.

To the extent that these secular sustainability-oriented groups and persons pepper their discourse with subtly or occasionally overtly religious elements, they open up the possibility of analyzing “a religious dimension in human life” without limiting the study to those features of

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<sup>351</sup> Evan Berry argued that both are potentially productive ways of looking at social movements that involve religion. The analogical approach suggests that it is primarily the religious *form* that is the vehicle for cultural transmission, but according to Berry “structural functionalism and other social scientific theories of ‘quasi-religions’ tend to obscure the religiosity of nature religion” (2009: 13). Genealogical explanations are stronger, particularly when analyzing nature religion, Berry presented this particular article at the “Inherited Land” colloquium at Florida International University, 28 February 2009.

culture that “we unhesitatingly label religion” (Saler 1999: xv). As Benson Saler noted, while these more subtle uses of religious language, metaphor and imagery do not always fall neatly into the categories approved by scholars of religion, “segments of the general public and persons pursuing special agendas often extend the use and inclusiveness of the term [religion] beyond conventional dictionary acceptations and supporting conceptualizations [and]...*when they do so, they are usually understood by others in the contemporary United States*” (Saler 1999: 23, italics in original). Attentiveness to the religious dimension of sustainability discourse helps to illustrate the social and political pervasiveness of religion in the United States, and hopefully helps to highlight the need for sensitivity when engaging the value preferences and norms of individuals or groups from other cultures.

### **Connecting the Dots between Experts in the Network: Mapping the “Ecological” System**

All of the informants cited in this chapter are religious at least in the broad sense that I use the term here. Daniella Dennenberg from NWEI told me that she was spiritual, though not religious. Interestingly, Deb McNamara (also from NWEI) noted the early Latin roots of the word religion, meaning “to tie” or “to bind,” and suggested that she was certainly “bound to a spiritual path.” McNamara grew up a Midwestern Lutheran (and said that in some sense, that is still her core identity), gained a greater understanding of social equity in the peace corps, attended a Buddhist university, and is now a Haatha Yoga teacher and practitioner whose “connection to the earth is part of my spiritual practice as well” ( interview with author, 17 September 2008). Both claimed that they considered their spiritual lives to be important motivators for their career choices. Nancy Johnston of NatCap noted that sustainability, as a lifestyle choice that involved commitment to deep seated values, was itself a sort of religious practice.

While Lovins is less apt to talk in explicitly spiritual terms, she did, with some frequency, allude to the importance of spiritual work to all the other “species” of sustainability advocacy. In addition, as she noted in a public lecture in Gainesville, her mentors (David Brower and Dana Meadows, for example) participated in what she called the “inner” work of sustainability, namely “changing hearts and minds.” Lovins told me that everybody she works with impacts how she approaches sustainability. Her adaptable approach is one of the hallmarks of successful sustainability advocates. “Sally [Bingham], for example,” Lovins reported, “has helped me to understand the importance of communities of faith. And speaking to people with the understanding... whatever position they’re in, whether they’re a CEO or government official or whatever, they probably have a faith, a values structure in there as well, and that it’s important to speak to that as well” (interview 6 August 2008).

Reflecting on the web of relationships between leader-advocates who participate in religious, interfaith, and explicitly secular sustainability-oriented groups, it is clear that there are direct and indirect connections between all of them, providing several relatively smooth avenues for the transmission of ideas, strategies, and resources. Campbell noted that his work was similar to Martin Palmer’s in many ways, and that he depended on working with Palmer in large part because of the existing network that ARC had cultivated. Campbell told me that “Martin has been instrumental in helping me to think through this from an interfaith perspective” (interview 29 July 2008). Campbell is an evangelical Christian who maintains close professional ties with Joel Hunter, Richard Cizik, Cal DeWitt and other evangelicals, is in the process of producing a handbook on religions and conservation with Martin Palmer and ARC, and also works with Khalid and IFEES and other faith-based organizations to achieve CI’s conservation goals. Campbell works closely with green evangelicals in the U.S. and worldwide, while Sally

Bingham remains close to at least Joel Hunter and Richard Cizik. Bingham's Interfaith Power and Light was one of the honorees of ARC's Sacred Gifts program, and Bingham also maintains a close personal and professional relationship with Lovins. While the operatives at NWEI are not necessarily directly connected to this particular expert network through individuals, certainly they draw on common bodies of literature (such as those exposed in Chapters 5 and 6), ideas championed by individuals within this network, and work toward similar goals. Recalling this complex web of relations, it should be clear that all of the informants in this study are often directly, and all are at least indirectly related through the connections of these expert networks. Each of these experts and their marketing of sustainability contribute to the idea that sustainability is not all about generating technical fixes or better management regimes. Even for those within the secular sustainability movement, the long-term persistence of humans within their habitats is, as Nobel Prize winner Al Gore put it in his award-winning documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, "a moral, ethical and spiritual challenge" (quoted in NWEI 2007: 53).

## CHAPTER 10 MANUFACTURING OR CULTIVATING COMMON GROUND?

I initiated this project because I was interested in the ways that leaders of sustainability movements endeavored to improve and refine the ability of communities and groups to communicate effectively across different value structures, social mores and practices, and world models. In short, to promote a sustainable civilization, it seems necessary to re-civilize the public sphere, making it safe for the presentation and democratic assessment of community values. After reviewing the emergence of sustainability and the prevalence of its religious dimensions, my goal has been to map the spread of the normative and religious features of sustainability within a social network comprised of leaders from religious, interfaith, and secular non-governmental organizations. I found that there is significant agreement among informants about some of the key religious features of sustainability and the strategies utilized to advertise it, as well as overlap on some of the motivating factors that prompted these people to engage in sustainability advocacy.

I began by suggesting that my methodology derived primarily from the influences of the academic study of lived religion and from the methodologies favored by those who participate in the area of study typically termed religion and nature.<sup>352</sup> These methodological approaches within religious studies may benefit from literature on social movement theory and cognitive anthropology, at least when employed for the analysis of social movements. First, however, more needs to be said regarding how to analyze religious discourse within a social movement.

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<sup>352</sup> For differences between “Religion and Ecology” and “Religion and Nature” see A. Peterson’s “Toward a Materialist Environmental Ethics” in *Environmental Ethics* (2006), and Bron Taylor’s “Religious Studies and Environmental Concern” (2005c) and Arne Kalland’s “The Religious Environmentalist Paradigm” (2005), both in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*.

## **Theorizing the Religious Dimension of Sustainability**

There are at least three levels where values are recognizable in population subgroups. Values can be 1) related to concepts of self and other through psychological and cognitive processes internal to the individual (the subjective, individual dimension), 2) implicated in specific behaviors of individuals (the visible, performative dimension), and 3) recognizable as social patterns, preferences or behaviors (the social dimension). Each of these levels (from internalized ideas and values to personal and interpersonal behaviors to larger patterns of social behavior) may be broken down and examined in more detail. But much work focused on religion and environmental issues aims to impact the first dimension, individual perceptions and values, assuming that changes in such values lead to ecologically responsible behavior.

Sociologists, on the other hand, have focused on the persistence of the broader social patterns and preferences related to environmental issues, and have also begun to provide empirical evidence relating values and beliefs to behaviors (i.e., Stern et al. 1999). These studies help to provide data that may be helpful to religion scholars interested in the gap between values and behaviors, but in most cases such studies say very little about how the triggers of environmentally friendly behaviors are transmitted through culture (which I suggested above occurs primarily through individual exchange and inference). It is here that some theories offered by religion scholars and cognitive scientists may compliment sociological theories.

The informants discussed here are engaged in an economy of ideas, metaphors, and imagery, and in many cases religious ideation, metaphor and language acts as the currency for exchange. While the prevalence of the religious dimension of sustainability is clear from my examination of this small but well-connected network of actors, another hypothesis that awaits further investigation is that the religious dimension is increasingly important throughout the broader mass movements related to sustainability.

## **Collective Action Frames and Manufacturing Meaning**

In the theoretical interlude (Chapter 3) I referred to philosopher Colin Campbell's cultic milieu and his argument that oppositional subcultures often shared or freely exchanged motivational tropes (1972; 2002; see pp. 50-51). The sustainability milieu, I suggested, demonstrated similar inter-group exchange. But as the data from this project have made clear, within the sustainability milieu motivational concepts, metaphors, imagery and practices are not transmitted only within oppositional subcultures but also between subcultures and mainstream cultural groups. Bron Taylor noted a similar pattern of exchange between oppositional subcultures and international venues among members of the environmentalist milieu who resonate with dark green religion (2009). Environmental historians Thomas Dunlap and Roderick Nash have also examined environmentalism as a religious social movement (Dunlap 1988), or characterized the exchange of values that occurs within this environmentalist milieu (Nash 2001).

While social networks facilitate and promote the formation of the moral imagination in particular directions, individual agents within these networks constantly make inferences about the practices and values that are and ought to be associated with these networks and are thus the primary vectors of social transmission. Groups within networks are socially and politically efficacious to the extent that their constituents frame the material and emotional experiences of their lives with a collective pool of interpretive schemata, which "enable individuals to 'locate, perceive, identify, and label' occurrences within their life space and the world at large" (Benford and Snow 2000: 614).<sup>353</sup> Extending this idea, the sociologists Robert Benford and David Snow

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<sup>353</sup> Here Benford and Snow quote Erving Goffman (1974), who they credit with the idea of framing within social movement theory.

suggest that movement participants construct *collective action frames* that motivate and legitimate particular activities.

According to sociologists who investigate such frames, social group participation is a form of active meaning construction through the enlargement of personal identity facilitated by a perceived correspondence between individual and collective identities.<sup>354</sup> Benford and Snow also suggest, however, that insufficient attention has been given to the processes through which movement participation and identity are linked. Their work on frame alignment processes, they believe, helps to elucidate the link. It is important to recognize that often such collective action frames are contested in the public sphere, with the aim of both sides of the debate to “shape...ideological landscapes and societal practices” (Stern and Dietz 1999: 82). But ultimately, as Paul Stern and Thomas Dietz contend, “the base for general movement support lies in a conjunction of values, beliefs, and personal norms—feelings of personal obligation that are linked to one’s self-expectations” (1999: 83). Stern and Dietz’s point is that if participants accept the basic values of a particular movement (endorse their collective action frames), believe that one or more of these values are threatened, and perceive that there are social or political avenues through which personal action can help to minimize the damage to or restore those values, they are more likely to engage in practices to that end. Their findings support arguments for frame alignment and identity transformation, but suggest that lumping together the diverse values endorsed by activist and non-activist (but supportive) members of various social movements is unhelpful.<sup>355</sup> In short, they suggest that explicit renderings of the values that

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<sup>354</sup> Benford and Snow quote Ganson that “participation in social movements frequently involves enlargement of personal identity for participation and offers fulfillment and realization of the self” (2000: 631).

<sup>355</sup> For example, Stern and Deitz suggest that the relationships between the values and behaviors of those who actively engage in pro-environmental behavior are significantly different than those same relationships among those who verbally support environmental advocacy, but do not themselves engage in such behaviors. They suggest that these individuals likely have significantly different sets of values and social opportunities for enacting those values.

particular groups or movements endorse are crucial to discerning their mobilization strategies and their political aims (1999: 91).

Just as networks should not be imagined as possessing “agency,” however, such collective action frames do not exist autonomously, but depend upon individual agents (for further discussion see Chapter 3, pp. 54-57). Recall that Vasquez cautioned against imagining networks themselves as the primary agents of social transmission, though networks do act as boundary markers that enable place-making activities and identity construction (2008: 168-169). Networked perceptual frameworks are constantly contested at the individual level as agents make inferences and interpret experiences with their adapting cognitive tools (Benford and Snow 2000: 614). Individual agents are particularly important for the spread of sustainability-related values. As Luther Gerlach noted, leaders of SPIN movements are particularly active in networking with participants from different groups.<sup>356</sup> It is these leaders who build “*personal relationships*” with participants in other groups, acting as “*traveling evangelists*” who carry information, practices, and motivational metaphors across the network (Gerlach 2002: 296).<sup>357</sup> It is the basic beliefs and core values of social movements, which I have here referred to as religious, which are transmitted across these networks.

The point here is that the leaders of the particular organizations analyzed in this project are *intentionally facilitating frame alignment processes* through precisely the sort of charismatic interpersonal evangelization proposed by Gerlach above. More recent studies by environmental

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<sup>356</sup> Gerlach argued that the polycentrism that characterizes SPIN movements does not imply that there are *no* leaders, but rather that there are typically *many* leaders. Such leaders tend to be more charismatic than bureaucratic, and focus more on inspiration than political systematization (2002: 294).

<sup>357</sup> For Gerlach, many leaders of SPIN movements “are more accurately understood as its evangelists....those who evangelize across the movement as a whole....evangelists are those who zealously spread the ideology of any movement, promoting its ideas, reinforcing the beliefs of participants...” (Gerlach 2002: 296). The italics appeared in Gerlach’s original text.

policy experts have focused on similar social phenomena, referring to intentional blending of discreet knowledge domains: “novel analogies in sustainability are those that align two partial domains of knowledge across one of these break points to form a third domain of knowledge, called the *blend*” (Hukkinen 2008: 65). Sustainability, according to Janne Hukkinen, necessitates the promotion of socially robust knowledge (rather than knowledge that is merely scientifically reliable) for positive policy outcomes. Socially robust knowledge further requires experts capable of promoting cognitive blending of norms from constituencies that are situated differently socially and economically. For my purposes here, frame alignment and cognitive blending processes are functionally equivalent since they both lead to the translation of values across different communities of accountability.<sup>358</sup>

The spread of these *blended values* within and across particular groups can be viral, as Joel Hunter indicated in Chapter 7. Namely they can spread from evangelizers to those who are in some way “primed” to receive their messages, whether because of shared values or practices, preexisting sympathies with particular aims, personal relationships, or social or physical conditions. These theories have resonances with cognitive anthropological theories which understand the transmission of “cultural facts” as parallel to the transmission of pathogens within populations. Integrating these theoretical models may provide a way to get better data about how values and practices are enacted and spread through social movements.

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<sup>358</sup> Hukkinen’s area of research is on traditional reindeer management regimes among the indigenous peoples of Finland and their interaction with national resource management programs. Hukkinen is interested in the ways in which these disparate groups effectively speak to (and argue with) each other. His work resonates with this project in several ways. For example, he finds that both storytelling (2008: 70-75) and the inclusion of individuals who worked together despite personal disagreements (2008: 126) helped to ensure successful integration of government and traditional interests.

## The Sustainability “Virus”: Mental Representations Matter

Scholarship on framing processes and social movement theory is helpful for theorizing social phenomena, but in many cases such theories tend to overemphasize the social construction of reality and underestimate the dependence of communities upon the surrounding ecological matrix. In the 1970s, reactions to structuralist tendencies in anthropological literature from scholars such as Dan Sperber illustrated that social mores were also related to and influenced by ecological circumstances. In his Malinowski Memorial Lecture in 1985, for example, Sperber dissented from Malinowski’s notion of the “psychology of emotions,” where religion was a projection of psychological needs and dispositions and human minds were biologically predisposed to be susceptible to certain cultural phenomena.<sup>359</sup> As Sperber put it,

the human mind is susceptible to cultural representations, in the way the human organism is susceptible to diseases. Of course, diseases are, by definition, harmful, whereas cultural representations are not...I see, then, the causal explanation of cultural facts as necessarily embedded in a kind of *epidemiology of representations* (1985: 74, italics in original).

Cultural “things,” then, are “distributions of [mental] representations in a human population, *ecological patterns of psychological things*” (1985: 73, italics mine). Understanding particular cultures, or social movements in this case, depends upon noting which representations appear to be the most “catching” and thus most persistent over time (Sperber 1994: 54).

The idea that epiphenomenal cultural norms can be reliably transmitted directly to persons within populations is mistaken, according to empirical research by anthropologists such as Sperber and Scott Atran. As Atran and his collaborators put it, “One alternative to normative accounts of cultural formation, transmission, and evolution is ‘cultural epidemiology,’ which assumes *that socially learned information is acquired chiefly through inference rather than*

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<sup>359</sup> This lecture was published as “Anthropology and Psychology: Towards an Epidemiology of Representations,” in *Man* 20 (1) in 1985. Sperber’s intention was to fill in lacunae in both anthropology and psychology of religion.

*imitation*” (Atran et al. 2002: 435, emphasis added). Because of this, unlike pathogens transmitted from one susceptible agent to another, cultural representations are transformed each time they are transmitted (Sperber 1985: 75) since inference depends on the neural pathways that process sensory information (and like fingerprints or snowflakes, no two neural nets are the same).

Here Atran and his collaborators are directly challenging meme theory, since it depends upon the transference of cultural forms between generations through imitation and ritualization. Indeed, some forms of religious ritual are passed down through practice and imitation, but in such cases it has not been demonstrated that such performance is subject to natural selection. For meme theory to have explanatory power it must find structural similarities among cultural forms between generations to demonstrate that these cultural forms are units of natural selection. To date, no such empirical evidence has surfaced.<sup>360</sup> Group adaptationists also generally disagree with those who have advanced meme theories since meme theorists believe that religion itself is not adaptive, but rather parasitical on other adapted features of human cognition and behavior (see for example D.S. Wilson 2002: 53). The main problem with meme theory, in my view, is that it postulates an additional level of explanation (a “cultural unit” subject to natural selection) when simpler, more materialist models account for and predict the same range of phenomena. In short, although meme theory is intuitively appealing, there has been no empirical work to support such intuitions. Some, however, have suggested ways in which meme theory might be put to empirical tests (see for example Matt Gers’s essay “Memes vs. God: Dennett and Dawkins Take on Religion” [2009]).

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<sup>360</sup> There is extensive literature debating the merit of memes. See for example Susan Blackmore’s *The Meme Machine* (1999), Kate Distin’s *The Selfish Meme: A Critical Reassessment* (2004), and Daniel Dennett’s *Breaking the Spell* (2006: 341-357). Blackmore and Dennett generally defend the idea, while Distin attempts to provide a sympathetic criticism.

While the importance of individual perception and cognition implies that there may be some uniquely private (at least for the time being) kernel in the chain of information processing which transcends investigators' tools (Saler 1999), this does not mean that such phenomena are not investigable at all.<sup>361</sup> What it means is that the most productive analytical approach is to trace the material manifestations and public deployments of such inferences (Peterson 2006). The inferences made by individuals within particular movements, and then performed in the public sphere should be the subjects of study. As Atran and his co-authors put it,

People's mental representations interact with other people's mental representations to the extent that those representations can be *physically transmitted in a public medium*....These public representations, in turn, are sequenced and channeled by ecological features of the external environment (including the social environment) that constrain psychophysical interactions between individuals (Atran, Medin and Ross 2005: 751, emphasis added).

Beginning with philosophical and social scientific explanations of social movements offered in Chapter 3 and in this chapter, and moving toward psychological and cognitive explanations of social transmission within some sub-populations here, an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for what motivates participation in some social movements emerges. The analysis has moved from large-scale social movement theory, to network theory (used in both environmental sciences and religious studies), noted how particular nodes (agents) engage in collective action framing and cognitive blending to solidify or challenge existing "powerscapes," and looked at the cognitive and subjective sources of cultural transmission. This moral anthropology of a "nested individual"<sup>362</sup> is non-reductive: it suggests that cultural phenomena are, as Sperber put it, *ecological* patterns of psychological things, not merely subjective psychological facts. This model does not assume, however, that culture and the networks that

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<sup>361</sup> Nor does this imply that such tools will not develop in the near future. At present, however, there is an epistemological gap that has not yet been overcome.

<sup>362</sup> The "nested individual" is the agent who assimilates information from the nested communities of accountability to which they belong, and then acts upon this information in the world.

comprise it are epiphenomenal or autonomous, with their own energy and capable of imposing particular values onto the minds of citizens.<sup>363</sup> In this, the theoretical framework offered here accords with what Anna Peterson has called a “chastened constructivism,” admitting that socially constructed understandings of humans and their habitats impact beliefs and practices, but emphasizing that embodied beings also face biological and ecological constraints (2001: 209-212).

To generate qualitative data illuminating what strategies for promoting sustainability seem to have the most significant effects, I began with this theoretical framework and attempted to map the relationships between leaders in different sectors of sustainability movements, noting instances of overlap in their general approach and the motivational themes, metaphors and strategies used. What this data cannot accurately discern is causation. It cannot prove that one informant “caught” a particular “strain” of the sustainability virus (a particular metaphor, for example) directly from another. However, if the theoretical framework discussed above has explanatory power, close personal and professional relationships among leaders of groups are important synapses for the exchange of ideas and practices within larger networks of movements and groups. The high level actors interviewed here are attempting to promote a shift in anthropological understandings by highlighting biological, ecological, and even spiritual interdependence, and through risky engagement with foreign individuals and groups, open to an honest discussion of values. They often use biophilic or cosmophilic imagery, or use biological

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<sup>363</sup> Atran and his collaborators suggest that structuralism, in the form espoused by Claude Levi-Strauss, Mary Douglas and Edmund Leach erred by suggesting that cultural forms were somehow autonomous and separate from individuals and behaviors. Counter-currents in anthropology, typified by Marvin Harris’ materialist approach, were overly-reductive, “wav[ing] away the superstructure or ideology of cultural forms as nonmaterial or epiphenomenal by-products of underlying material causes (ecological, economic, or genetic). We hold that ideas are just as material as behaviors and are indispensably constitutive of the causal chains that produce cultural regularities” (quote from footnote Atran et al. 2005: 748). I am generally in accord with Atran et al. here. For further elaboration, see the work of Michael Cole (1998; 2007), whom Atran et al. draw upon for their psychological models.

and cultural diversity as cognitive tools to facilitate such affectively grounded engagement (see Hukkinen 2008 for more on cognitive tools for sustainability). To the extent that this imagery is religious, those who strategically deploy it in the public sphere are players in “spiritual games.”<sup>364</sup> Spiritual games directly challenge some assumptions of traditional economic game theory, including the notion that humans are the only moral agents playing the game, calling attention to noneconomic values that are central to deliberation about what it is that ought to be sustained.

A rough summary of the data will help to make clearer the spiritual games played by these actor networks, and how the economies of ideas and significations they perpetuate support sustainability movements.

### **Finding Religion in Social Movements**

The term sustainability and its cognate sustainable development are not derived specifically from religious terminology and do not necessarily by themselves carry spiritual overtones. It is precisely this fact that makes the definitions of religion employed by some religion and nature scholars and anthropologists helpful for exploring the religious dimensions of sustainability advocacy and discourse. I chose to exercise definitions relying on *family resemblances*, fuzzy sets of attributes that are loosely related, though they do not share an essential substance or feature. As Benson Saler put it, “To the extent...that we study elements that we regard as especially typical of religion in less typical settings, we attend to a *religious dimension* in human life that reaches out beyond religion” (2004: 230). Religion scholars should

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<sup>364</sup> Atran et al. used this phrase to describe the use of language that implies the intentionality and agency of so-called “resources,” calling into question their standing as unconscious objects to be utilized for human ends (2002: 438-439).

be interested in attending to this religious dimension wherever they find it, even (and perhaps especially) if it occurs outside the boundaries of what is considered typically religious.

Social movements such as sustainability can be productively analyzed with a set of lenses that recognizes the spiritual or metaphysical assumptions that underlie the public expression of values and much political decision making. If sustainability is a strategy of cultural adaptation to the dynamic interplay between ecological and social systems that is often tied to religious or spiritual narratives that describe how to fulfill what is probably an innate human desire to live “meaningfully,” then sustainability is necessarily normative, and inextricably tied to core values, beliefs, and practices.

### **General Summary of Results**

The primary data for the study included twenty targeted interviews with high level actors from various sustainability-related movements, as well as more informal interviews with at least two dozen other sustainability advocates by telephone, email, or in conference or event settings. I found that among my primary targets, nearly all respondents attributed their engagement in sustainability-related work either to concern for human rights and equity, or profound experiences with or in nature. In the end, 62% of respondents cited experiences in nature as their primary motivation for their work, while 37% cited their awareness of social justice issues. Even higher proportions of my informants either communicated primarily through stories or narratives, or explicitly addressed the importance of narratives for disseminating new ethical ideals and behaviors (71%), while 88% endorsed the tactical use of religious or spiritual language to form strategic partnerships, and leverage policy decisions.

One of the most powerful effects that emerged from the data was the strong connectivity of the network of actors despite the political, ideological and geographical boundaries separating them. In other words, although the informants were chosen from different categories they

demonstrated direct and indirect influences on each other across these boundaries, lending at least some additional support to the idea that metaphors and motivational tropes are exchanged rather freely across sub-populations. Finally, the importance of the term *sustainability* to the work of these constituencies varied.

Among evangelical Christian organizations, the term was typically used in conversation casually to describe taking a long-term perspective (a sustainable building, a sustainable program, etc.), or as shorthand for general cultural goals. Most saw creation care as a specifically evangelical movement that shared some ideas and long-term goals with the larger movement toward sustainability, but these respondents still advocated independence from larger social movements.

Among interfaith groups, the term sustainability was somewhat more frequently used, but the primary vehicles of motivational language and imagery remained explicitly religious narratives drawn from specific extant religious beliefs and practices. For these informants sustainability was a term referring to overlapping and interdependent ecological and social concerns.

Among secular groups, reaction was mixed. For Natural Capitalism Solutions, sustainability is more than a slogan or a motto. It is a set of consequences that derive from making decisions based on information that integrates financial, social and ecological costs and benefits with a group's mission and values. The term acts as the future horizon toward which human, ecological and economic systems are headed. For NWEI, sustainability is also "generally accepted as a personal and cultural goal" (NWEI 2007: 10).<sup>365</sup> While cautious of the term, NWEI still accepts sustainability as a widely used policy goal. Brian Campbell provided

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<sup>365</sup> The first pages of the "Choices for Sustainable Living" module, however, make it clear that there are a variety of definitions of sustainability used to support widely divergent sets of practices.

one of the most complex answers about the use of sustainability, and admitted that its use was widespread in NGOs dedicated to both conservation and development. However, such usages tend to be highly inconsistent, leading Campbell to believe that in many cases, it served more as an abstract conceptual motivator than a concrete idea (interview 29 July 2008).

## **Discussion of Results**

First I will highlight some of the common elements between these religious, interfaith, and secular groups. Second, I will discuss the usefulness of sustainability to my respondents, and speculate about some possible futures for the use of the term sustainability in national and international political discourse. I found that the frequency of use and the general importance of the term sustainability increase along a continuum from religious to secular groups, and from grassroots to international groups.

For the most part the informants do not share common value sets, and by highlighting the commonalities between themes discussed by particular actors within these organizations I do not intend to carelessly imply that these commonalities are a foundation for a global ethics or a common prescriptive lifestyle (indeed, most of my informants would agree that this would be highly problematic). Rather, I intend to highlight these commonalities because they help to unpack some of novel contributions of this study.

### **“Getting out”**

Profound experiences with or in nature were the most frequently cited catalysts for sustainability advocacy. Recall Bingham’s epiphany (from Chapter 8) that as she listened to the heartbeat of the Earth, she perceived that it was alive. Bingham emphasized that her ability to “listen” to the earth had helped her to love it (and after all, “you protect what you love!”). Deb McNamara of NWEI told me that “you have to learn how to listen [to nature]...if you don’t have that relationship with the natural world, I don’t know how I can expect someone to make choices

that have the natural world in mind if they've never established that connection" (interview 17 September 2008). Similarly, Cal DeWitt recalled countless childhood hours spent with snakes, lizards, and other smaller animals, Raymond Randall referred to the Colorado mountains where he grew up, and others cited summer or weekend camping trips as formative for their moral sensibilities. As some sustainability advocates noted in informal conversation, the importance of "getting out" signals a general agreement with Richard Louv's well-known *Last Child in the Woods* (2005), which made the case that experience *with* and *in* nature is necessary for a healthy, well-adjusted and environmentally responsible culture.<sup>366</sup>

Other informants suggested that empathetic engagement with other people or communities was the most important ingredient for their own moral imaginations. Getting outside one's own perspective, attempting to comprehend (not endorse) the deep values and core beliefs of others means that such engagement is, as John Smith put it, "on the basis of trust, and 'let's explore what you're about, not telling you what you're about. And that's the key...to faith, and recognizing how faith works'" (interview 29 May 2008). Sustainability, much like faith, requires some amount of trust and vulnerability on the part of individual players, what I have referred to as an ethics of empathetic negotiation. As Hunter Lovins recalled of her heated discussion with a Pakistani representative at a United Nations event, lack of trust (which in many cases is deserved) sullies the heterarchic relationships that lay the groundwork for easy technology transfer, positive standard of living increases, and shared fulfillment across the significant political and economic boundaries that determine access to resources.

Whether getting out of doors or getting out of one's own "skin," such encounters with nature or with the core values of others is important for "priming" individuals to receive

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<sup>366</sup> This book's arguments bear a strong resemblance to human ecologist Paul Shepard's *Nature and Madness* (1982), which Louv does not cite.

messages related to sustainability. All of my informants cited either the importance of profound experiences in nature, or a deep concern for the well-being of others (whether other humans, other species, or the entire world or cosmos) as generative of a concern for long-term species survivability, and as a personal motivator for their professional lives.

### **Digging deeper into the usefulness of “sustainability”**

From the beginning I have argued that sustainability is a heuristic term used to throw light on particular sets of individual or community values. I used the term in this study to refer to a manner of engaging ethnic, cultural or ethical others that promotes decision making with an eye to long-term resilience, and ties these decisions to ideas about what constitutes a fulfilling life. I have found the term useful for analysis because it refers to a set of ideas about how humans engage each other with an eye to broader ecological systems. But more should be said about the usefulness of the term to my informants and their work.

**Sustainability among secular groups:** Among respondents from the secular world, sustainability was envisioned as an amorphous idea. For instance, Fred Kirschenmann of the Leopold Center is an expert on sustainable agriculture and described his work primarily through stories about successful agricultural schemes (in terms of biodiversity increase, productivity and profitability, and self-sufficiency). For him, sustainability was not a reliable policy goal, but rather “a prescription...like justice—an evolving concept...it doesn’t lend itself to definition. It’s a journey, and there are always surprises along the way!” (interview 24 December 2007; see also Hukkinen 2008: 4). Community organizer Judy Skog told me she imagines sustainability in more personal terms, that “it’s mostly about personal choices, and helping others see how they can do it [live more sustainably],” but acknowledged that there “are as many definitions as there are people” (interview 3 January 2008).

Ben Campbell of CI suggested that the use of sustainability as a big-picture goal for the international community had been eclipsed by *climate change*, a new threat which was performing the cultural function formerly occupied by sustainability: providing a conceptual field within which a host of complexly interconnected issues (social, political, economic, and ecological) could be talked about together, and planned for collectively. Campbell told me that “the question of sustainability is a hugely open to interpretation subject... You use sustainability in a U.S. context, it’s radically different than you would use it from, let’s say, in Latin American, African, any developing country context, where natural resources play a much greater role in livelihoods (interview 29 July 2008). According to Campbell, however, global anxiety about climate change has created a convergence of concern for social and economic development and ecological sustainability, prompting many conservation organizations that have historically been reticent to engage faith communities to seek out novel partnerships.<sup>367</sup>

**Sustainability among interfaith groups:** The respondents and literature from the two interfaith groups tended to use sustainability as a modifier for particular practices or goals, to highlight the long-term perspective inherent in particular faith narratives, or to tie together common elements between different faith perspectives. However, in the two cases analyzed here, the term sustainability was not the focal point of activism. For IPL, climate change (not sustainability, much as Palmer and Campbell indicated) functioned as a description of interconnected global socio-politico-ecologic-economic problems. For ARC, great emphasis was placed on honoring and invigorating existing religious narratives, in which case

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<sup>367</sup> Campbell mused about how slow secular conservation organizations have been to warm to the possibility of potentially powerful partnerships with religious groups. He noted that “Worldvision [a Christian NGO] is a \$2.1 billion a year organization, with 34,000 employees working in over 100 countries. By that comparison, CI...one of the ‘Big Three’ conservation organizations...[with] about 1,000 employees in 40 countries...is a minor player” (interview 29 July 2008).

sustainability is a consequence of re-imagining old religious narratives and creatively interpreting them to build peace and resilience today. Martin Palmer of ARC told me that,

To a very big extent, sustainable development is a phrase that's of academic interest, primarily. Because I don't hear it being used very much by groups on the ground....For all its inadequacies, and simplicities, it [the idea of sustainable development] did at least put together the tension between sustainability and development, and recognized that it was a tension (interview 27 May 2008).

Like Campbell, Palmer believed that the idea of sustainability (and sustainable development) had been eclipsed by other more recent concepts such as climate change or the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>368</sup>

**Evangelicals and sustainability:** For Raymond Randall, chairperson of Northland Church's "Creation, I Care" taskforce, sustainability referred primarily to the business case for sustainability: "If you look at climate change, sustainability and creation care, the monikers given [to current interconnected crises] by the environmental movement, the business movement, and the church [respectively], the actions taken are largely the same" (interview 29 May 2009). Because of their intent to remain morally outside the mainstream evangelicals perceive their particular sort of advocacy for sustainability-related goals to be distinctly different in its motivation from mainstream sustainability, which, according to Randall, Hunter, and others is a secular movement that stems in large part from environmentalism and secular humanism.<sup>369</sup> As Joel Hunter put it, the phrase creation care "came from a desire to separate ourselves, to be

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<sup>368</sup> He reported, "I think sustainable development has been superseded by the Millennium Development Goals, which are in a transition state, half about sustainable development and optimistic, and half, 'oh no, we're going to hell!' I do think this [the negative message] drives people away [from engaging in sustainable behaviors]" (interview 27 May 2008).

<sup>369</sup> Add to it some evangelicals' perception that environmentalism is quasi-religious and often shares affinities with pagan beliefs, and that secular humanism is itself a sort of "religion," and it becomes unsurprising that they would not use the term "sustainability" to describe their manner of combining concern for financial well-being with social justice and ecological integrity. The evangelical perception that they are somehow "outside" of the mainstream culture because of their commitment to Christ, and yet called to exact positive political change through mainstream mechanisms (such as prevailing social and economic structures) begs for more careful investigation.

theologically distinct from secular environmental groups, and other religious groups” (interview 30 May 2008).

### **Hypotheses for Future Research and the Growing Importance of Sustainability**

If, for the sake of analytical clarity, one classifies sustainability-oriented NGOs on a continuum from explicitly religious on the one end to secular on the other, it becomes clear that the importance of the term sustainability, and its deployment in more general manifestations increases as one moves from explicitly religious groups toward secular organizations. If analysis concentrates instead on the spectrum that runs between grassroots groups and international NGOs, then a similar (and perhaps related) trend emerges: frequency of the use of a more generalized understanding of sustainability increases as one moves from grassroots toward international level organizations. In summary, the use and importance of the term sustainability increased as one moved along the continuum from explicitly religious (on one end) to secular (on the other), and from grassroots to international groups.<sup>370</sup>

My hypothesis is that as inclusiveness increases (for example in international level groups versus grassroots organizations) there is a greater need for a non-partisan “binding agent,” an affectively grounded idea or set of metaphors that acts as a common ground for initial conversation. In a significant sense, because it is tied to community and individual values, sustainability sometimes acts as shorthand for a set of value preferences that includes social equity, ecological awareness, and financial well-being.

In places where sustainability provides convincing identity markers for people who use the term to reflect particular visions of where society is headed and what values it ought to

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<sup>370</sup> The importance of the idea of sustainability to the grassroots organization NWEI may challenge the contention that, in general, grassroots groups are less apt to utilize the term sustainability. They are a secular organization, however, which raises the question of whether the importance of sustainability as a cognitive tool in secular organizations is able to overcome a general reticence to deploy such terms to describe local level issues. This is an empirical question.

maximize, it is fulfilling the function of explicitly religious narratives—a basic companion to human culture. In many cases even secular sustainability-related NGOs disseminate moral anthropologies, using the rubric of science or social science to frame them within an evolutionary, cosmological hierarchy, precisely the sort of narrative I have described here as religious.

The use of the term sustainability was not of central importance to the work of some informants, but because of sustainability's widespread and rapidly increasing use in Western governance structures, higher education institutions, and corporate slogans, *I believe that the concern for sustainability as well as the use of the term will persist and flourish for the foreseeable future.* Although climate change is often used as a shorthand way to refer to interconnected social and ecological problems, *sustainability* is often used as a set of solutions for addressing such interconnected crises. So long, then, as climate change commands public, scientific and governmental attention, and sustainability remains a malleable an affectively-charged term that facilitates blending of disparate values, it should persist within various communities and within international political discourse. If I am right, then more careful analyses of what individuals and groups mean when they use the term and more accurate renderings of their professional networks will become increasingly important for generating genuinely open and adaptive democratic processes.

### **Sustainability Scenarios and the Global Resurgence of Religion**

International relations scholar Scott Thomas has noted that a global resurgence of religion in the past century has emerged both from the bottom up and from the top down, “a parallel development in the developed world and in developing countries that is part of a wider, already existing, critique of global modernity, authenticity and development” (2005: 44). As alternatives to modernity, authenticity and development, many from the developing and developed world

offer phrases such as *sustainability*, *bio-cultural preservation*, and *sustainable development*. Thus, sustainability and its cognates are genetically related to the global resurgence of religion. According to Thomas, the global resurgence of religion is often imagined to manifest in “various prospects for a new global religion or ‘world theology’” (2005: 117). In such cases, Thomas offered an alternative view that the “brave new world of a global civil society [the global civil religion] is... really part of the hegemony of Western modernity” (Thomas 2005: 117).

Bron Taylor, in contrast, has argued that if such a global religion takes on a green tint, the reverence-for-life values and anti-authoritarian sentiment that surfaces within the environmentalist milieu makes it unlikely that a democratic politics based in dark green spiritual sentiment would re-enforce or re-inscribe intolerance or fascism (1998; 2002; 2009: 195). But does the sustainability milieu, which includes many other constituencies, have such an inherent resistance to the imposition of particular cultural viewpoints? I envision at least two possible futures for sustainability in national and international political discourse and action.

## **Two Possible Sustainability Scenarios**

### **Manufacturing sustainability**

The first possible scenario is that sustainability, as a human-centered and management-oriented manifestation of an ongoing Western cultural project, might continue in some cases to further colonial impulses. Sustainability has from its inception been a human-centered set of movements, owing much to its close association with utilitarian resource management, business and government sectors and the military industrial complex. World Wars I and II and the Cold War, for example, provided fertile cultural ground for the emergence of new sources of inspiration and experimentation with sustainability-related practices (see Chapters 4 through 6 for further discussion). So while sustainability discourse integrates perceptions and metaphors from alternative and even oppositional sub-populations, it is also closely tied to traditional

sources of power and status quo, raising the possibility that the sustainability narrative may actually work against the ongoing manifestation of *dark* green religion on the global scale—at least in the short term.<sup>371</sup>

Within this scenario we might expect an increase in the use of the term sustainability by industrial, government and military actors and a concomitant assessment by these parties that they are the only bodies in a position to be able to engineer sustainability on a societal or cultural scale. In such cases, what sustainability *is*, is manufactured by cultural elites or powers and disseminated through tightly integrated economic and socio-political levers. One of the most telling signals of this scenario would be a continued increase in rhetoric that demands protections for biological and cultural diversity coupled with a continuing integration of global economic markets that compromises such preservation. Thus far, removing constraints on the global flows of capital has reduced biological and cultural diversity, and many doubt that real bio-cultural preservation can occur in the midst of continued economic globalization (Davison 2001; Worster 1993).

### **Cultivating sustainability**

A second possibility is that sustainability discourse may provide an incubation place and smooth transfer point for a gradual increase in the importation of deep green themes into

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<sup>371</sup> Taylor has suggested that in the very long term it is possible that a terrapolitan earth religion could be grafted onto, and eventually supplant (or make less common) most theistic forms of religion, since such theistic understandings typically have at least some elements that do not resonate with evolutionary theory (2004; 2009: 196-198). Research from demographer James Proctor and religion scholar Evan Berry, however, suggest that even an increase in nature religion may not necessarily cause a decrease in the prevalence of religions grounded in transcendent theism. Their studies have revealed that “transcendent sacredness” and “nonsacredness” represent opposing poles on the same underlying psychological factor (for a summary argument see Proctor and Berry 2005 and the suggested further readings). “Immanent sacredness,” however, is a relatively separate factor: “those who believe that nature is inherently sacred thus may or may not (despite possible logical contradictions) ascribe to transcendent sacredness or non-sacredness” (2005: 1574). Taylor’s concept of dark green religion is in many ways parallel to this idea of immanent sacredness, but if Proctor and Berry are correct then dark green religion may well coexist with transcendentally-oriented religious ideation and practice that are decidedly anthropocentric. On the other hand, one might not resonate with immanent sacredness at all, and yet work toward sustainability.

sustainability discourse. If this is the case, we might expect to see an increasing emphasis on shifting perception, worldview, or consciousness as central to sustainability (some early indications of which I have detailed here). There may be increased attentiveness to the purpose and application of particular technologies, as well as more earnest protections for indigenous peoples and their land tenure and rights to use. One of the most obvious signals that this scenario is manifesting would be some decentralization of economic activity. Alternatives to current exchange relations are almost always mentioned as prerequisites for sustainability. Political decentralization is also frequently mentioned. Indeed bioregional and other more localized forms of governance are often suggested as more sustainable political regimes. However, as Kenny and Meadowcroft have argued, the idea that greater decentralization necessarily leads to greater environmental responsibility is highly questionable both intellectually and practically (1999). I suspect, therefore, that economic decentralization is the more promising and more important piece of the sustainability puzzle. In such cases, sustainability is a process that develops from the bottom-up, cultivated into a resilient and organic cultural experiment.

Only greater epistemological scrutiny and time will tell whether sustainability, as a cultural project, is successful and thus adaptive. But if committed to an evolutionary perspective, then it is necessary to acknowledge that particular religious narratives do not necessarily persist simply because they fit scientific data or better integrate evolutionary theory. It is at best debatable whether religion itself is adaptive, although many of the “global religions” and other traditional forms of religious production extend into the deep past. While new forms of religious production undoubtedly emerge and others die off, those that perish may not do so solely on the basis of whether or not they approximate an accurate vision of reality. Even if

religious production is *part of* the complex of ideation and belief that is a factor in natural selection, it is unlikely to be the lone independent variable that determines fitness within habitats.<sup>372</sup> The question is not which religiously-tinged stories are *correct*, but which ones *work* in place.

### **Conclusions and a Look toward the Future**

I have argued that the rich content of the idea of sustainability is comprised of contributions from a set of loosely connected social movements whose history and strongest contemporary streams cannot be well understood without attending to their religious dimensions. Historically, this religious dimension has been an important part of sustainability discourse. Pragmatically, it has been one of the primary facilitators of communication among people with differing value structures. So the first conclusion to draw is that there is a strong religious dimension to nearly all sustainability advocacy, and that the mythos derived from the collected stories that sustainability advocates project into the public sphere is itself religious.

Second, the data gathered from my informants challenges the contentions of some environmental ethicists that public philosophy should not to include metaphysical speculation and religious commitments (i.e., Light 2002; Norton 2005). On the contrary, in at least some situations broad participation and inclusion of core values in public deliberation has generated better outcomes (in terms of increasing biodiversity, arresting ecological damage, or creating social resilience) (Senge et al. 2008: 225-280; Hukkinen 2008; Willard 2005; Palmer and Finlay 2003; Banathy 1997; Schwartz 1996 [1991]). Certainly the inclusion of such religious

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<sup>372</sup> See discussion below beginning on p. 289 of this chapter. There is an extensive literature debating whether religion is in any way adaptive. Darwin was the first to offer a “spandrelist” explanation for human religiosity after noting that his dog attributed agency to a windblown umbrella (1871 [1981]: 65-69). Others who offer a definition of religion that is not functional in the evolutionary sense include Guthrie (1993), Boyer (2001), Atran (2002) and Dawkins (2006). On the other hand, the most sophisticated approach to explaining religion with a group adaptationist approach is David Sloan Wilson’s *Darwin’s Cathedral* (2002). For Wilson a religion is a set of socially defined norms that are subject to natural selection, and is thus one of the primary variables determining the survivability of that society.

commitments in the public sphere would require practice and nuance, particularly in a country that guarantees that no religion can be endorsed by the state or receive preferential treatment. But if core values are not allowed in the public sphere, it is unfair for “public philosophers” to expect that the public policies they advocate will satisfy the diverse needs of an increasingly complex citizenry over the long term (for discussion of environmental philosophy as an applied public philosophy see Light and de-Shalit 2002; Light 2001; Light 2002).

Third, it is clear that social movements are adaptable to varying degrees. As many evolutionary psychologists and cognitive anthropologists have argued, *religion* may not be adaptive—that is, its pervasiveness and persistence in human culture does not prove that it promotes survival (for a good synopsis of those who interpret religion as adaptive and those who reject such understandings, see Bulbulia 2004 or Dawkins 2006: 161-207). However, *the religious dimension* of certain social movements may be one of the features of mass movements that acts as a unit of selection, for it is clear that even ostensibly secular sustainability movements utilize religious imagery and ideas to do political work. Certain social representations that have religious dimensions, such as sustainability, may act as units of cultural selection without reducing selection specifically to religion itself. We might expect that sustainability, as a movement specifically oriented toward helping humans survive in habitats over time, will have a better than average chance of persistence. If sustainability indeed grows into a long-term cultural project, it is probable that some of the religious imagery, language, and metaphor tied to it will be some of the most successful spiritual tropes over time. This raises questions about the place of studies that seek to find evidence of environmental consciousness within existing religions, for “there is no plausible sense in which religion as a whole (or any group-level distribution of beliefs) is a group-level adaptation, like a bee-hive” (Atran 2005: 55).

Green religions may be helpful starting places for motivating adherents to begin thinking differently about individual behaviors, but green religions *themselves* are not the answers to adapting to ecological and social problems.

Finally, this project provides some qualitative data that uncovers some of the connections between particular leaders of sustainability-related NGOs and the pathways through which they transmit information. One of the limitations of this study is that it explores small networks. However, the informants are well-connected individuals and they (and in most cases their organizations) are able to access the power nodes of global financial, development, and governance networks. The small network analyzed here is related to several other networks of varying scales, and analysis of these could help provide a better picture of how sustainability networks operate and what strategies generate long-term success.

Ultimately I agree with Atran and his co-authors when they state that “cultural differences in mental models and associated values play an important role in creating intergroup conflict and, therefore, may hold the key to addressing these conflicts” (Atran, Medin and Ross 2005: 744). These values and the practices that help to encourage their persistence in culture require greater scrutiny if intergroup conflict is to be minimized. We should not be surprised to find sustainability, which is a contemporary term for the now global preoccupation with species persistence, clothed in religious language. For religious language has historically been used to influence imagination, promote specific behaviors within particular social groups, ensure survival, negotiate peace, make war, and use and distribute resources. I suspect that as sustainability grows into the focus for global governance and development efforts as resource shortages, wars, and unexpected environmental disasters cause unprecedented destruction in an increasingly crowded world, it will be ever more important to attend to the religious dimension

of sustainability; if for no other reason, then to promote a more empathetic engagement with cultural, ethnic, and ethical others for the purpose of reducing suffering and increasing quality of life. The interdisciplinary theoretical models and the approach employed here have only begun to explore the myriad ways that sustainability is used, and for what ends. Where the religious dimension of sustainability shapes public discourse, focuses community desire and creates and sustains new forms of exchange it behaves in the public sphere as a political religion.

APPENDIX A  
LIST OF QUESTIONS

The following roman numerals comprise the six general categories where values and ethics appear to be particularly important in the sustainability movement.

**CATEGORIES:**

**I. Sustainability vs. Sustainable Development**

**II. Prescriptions for Achieving Sustainability**

**III. Central Normative Content of Sustainability**

**IV. Personal Motivations**

**V. Effectiveness**

**VI. Religious and Spiritual Themes**

**I. Sustainability vs. Sustainable Development**

- a) What is sustainability, or “sustainable development”? (Where do these ideas come from? Historically, culturally, geographically, what are its tributaries?)
- b) Do you see any difference between the two terms?
- c) What do you understand them to mean?
- d) When did you first hear the term SD or Sustainability?

**II. Prescriptions for Achieving Sustainability**

- a) Do different stakeholders have differing prescriptions for how to achieve sustainability?
- b) What are the priorities of these different stakeholders (i.e., energy efficiency, voluntary simplicity, systems thinking, green building, urban planning, social equity, etc.)?
- c) Who are the “experts” whose advice we should follow to chart the most sustainable course (are they scientists, economists, poets, etc.)?
- d) What fields of study or professions are most crucial to achieving a sustainable culture (economics, politics, science, education, etc.)?

**III. Central Normative Content of Sustainability**

- a) Have these central values changed over time?
- b) If so, how?
- c) Have the religious themes in sustainability discourse influenced these changing values?
- d) Do you have other ideas about *why* these values have changed?

**IV. Personal Motivations**

- a) What were your own primary motivations for getting into such work?
- b) To what in your own life do you trace the emergence of an awareness of whatever “principles” you take to be central to the quest for sustainability?
- c) Some people think their religious or spiritual beliefs are important to their nature-related values and practices. Do you?
- d) What is your specific niche in the movement?

**V. Effectiveness**

- a) In your opinion, how effective have sustainability initiatives been at promoting sustainable outcomes?

b) Do you think this will change in the future?

**VI. Religious and Spiritual Themes**

- a) Are you aware of any religious or spiritual themes in sustainability discourse? If so, characterize them.
- b) Has this tendency to evoke religious or spiritual themes changed (increased or decreased) over time? Do you think these trends will continue?
- c) Do you consider yourself to be religious?

APPENDIX B  
LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Jim Ball, telephone interview, EEN, Washington, DC (10 September 2008)  
Sally Bingham, interview, Interfaith Power and Light, San Francisco, CA (8 July 2008)  
Ben Campbell, telephone interview, Conservation International, Washington, DC (29 July 2008)  
D.D., University of Florida, Gainesville, FL (8 November 2005)  
Daniella Dennenberg, telephone interview, NWEI, Portland, OR (17 October 2008)  
Calvin DeWitt, interview, Deja Brew, Gainesville, FL (8 April 2008)  
D. H., University of Florida, Gainesville, FL (15 November 2005)  
Joel Hunter, interview, Northland Church, Longwood, FL (31 May 2008)  
Nancy Johnston, telephone interview, NatCap Solutions, Steamboat, CO (6 August 2008)  
Fazlun Khalid, interview, IFEEES, Balsaal Heath, Birmingham, UK (29 May 2008)  
Fred Kirschenmann, telephone interview, Leopold Center, Ames, IA (24 December 2007)  
Hunter Lovins, telephone interview, NatCap Solutions, Steamboat, CO (6 August 2008)  
Alexei Laushkin, telephone interview, EEN, Washington, DC (13 May 2008)  
A.K., University of Florida, Gainesville, FL (9 November 2005)  
Deborah McNamara, telephone interview, NWEI, Portland, OR (17 September 2008)  
Bryan Norton, telephone interview, Georgia Tech, GA (3 January 2008)  
A.N., University of Florida, Gainesville, FL (15 November 2005)  
N.P., Commerce Building, Gainesville, FL (1 December 2005)  
Martin Palmer, interview, Church Farm Cottage, Bath, UK (27 May 2008)  
Raymond Randall, interview, Northland Church, Longwood, FL (30 March 2008)  
J.S., Commerce Building, Gainesville, FL (2 November 2005)  
Judy Skog, telephone interview, Madison, WI (31 January 2008)  
John Smith, interview, pub, Liverpool, UK (29 May 2008)  
Bill Bradlee, telephone interview, Interfaith Power and Light, CA (October 2008)  
Julie Van Domelen, telephone interview, Loveland, CO (November 2007)  
Mary Evelyn Tucker, telephone interview, Yale University, CT (12 March 2009)

**Conferences and events for informal interviews and participant observation:**

“Let There Be Light,” Creation Care Conference, sponsored by Northland Church and the EEN,  
Longwood, FL (21 February 2008)  
“Serve to Preserve: Florida Summit on Climate Change,” sponsored by Governor Charlie Christ,  
Miami, FL (24-25 July 2008)  
“Working Together for Sustainability – On Campus and Beyond,” AASHE Conference, Raleigh,  
NC (9-11 November 2008)

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