

HEALING THE LAND: A CHARISMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL THEOLOGY

By

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This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Abigail Sara. May you learn to love the earth  
and the One who made it.

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In this thesis I examine the intersection between Charismatic Christian theology and Christian environmental theology. Historically, Charismatic Christians have been reluctant to fully engage the eco-theology discussion. Within this thesis I will analyze the history and theology of both the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements to help uncover the reasons why this sect of Christianity has largely neglected to engage environmental theology.

In spite of historic environmental negligence, I argue that Charismatic Christianity has significant contributions to make to the field of Christian eco-theology in particular, and to our general understanding of the role of human beings in the natural environment. In order to show this, I examine a Charismatic eco-theology which has recently been developed and is promoted by two Charismatic organizations. I have termed this eco-theology, "Healing the Land theology." Proponents of Healing the Land theology believe that there are evil spiritual forces which afflict communities around the world. Not only do these forces afflict people, but they also oppress the surrounding natural environment, often contributing to widespread ecological degradation. These Christians advocate for a specific spiritual process in order to bring healing to the land.

Using this eco-theology as a case study of a Charismatic approach to environmental theology, I show that Charismatic Christianity has the potential to offer a more holistic approach to Christian environmental theology. I also show that a Charismatic approach to eco-theology may present a more relational and rooted theological paradigm with which to interact with the natural world.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to explore the interaction between Charismatic Christian theology and Christian eco-theology. Historically, Charismatic Christians have been rather reluctant to make contributions to environmental theology. However, within this thesis I will show that the Charismatic movement may have considerable contributions to make to our understanding of the human relationship with the natural environment, and to the field of environmental theology. In fact, I will examine a kind of Charismatic eco-theology that has recently been developed and promoted by specific Charismatic organizations. This eco-theology envisions an active role for human beings in their relationship with nature, in which they do battle with hostile spiritual forces in an attempt to bring healing to natural ecosystems. This specific eco-theology will serve as a kind of case study to help answer more general questions regarding a Charismatic approach to environmental theology. I will show why this eco-theology is representative of a Charismatic approach to environmental theology, as well as the potential strengths and weaknesses such an approach may have to offer.

### **Background**

In 1967, historian Lynn White published “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crises,” in which he argued that modern society’s rampant abuse of natural resources, and the indifference to resulting major ecological problems, was due to the influence of the Christian tradition on modern culture. He argued that Christianity was a thoroughly anthropocentric religion and thus placed little value on the non-human creation, while it simultaneously gave human beings the injunction to dominate nature and its inhabitants. Since White’s critique of the Christian environmental worldview, Christian

theologians from various denominational backgrounds have taken up the task of defending their tradition. While some have devoted their efforts to Biblical studies, others have examined the writings of Christian thinkers throughout the history of the tradition and have noted the ecological consciousness in revered saints such as Francis of Assisi (who White also pointed to as an example for modern Christians to emulate). Still other scholars critiqued White's historical claims, pointing instead to the rise of industrial agriculture, and even to pre-Christian Greco-Roman philosophy as the driving force behind the current lack of an environmental ethos in Western culture.

In developing a Christian environmental theology, most Christian theologians have utilized a few common themes. One of the most pervasive of these themes is the stewardship ethic. Christian theologians argue that when God gives humanity authority and dominion over plants and animals in the Genesis narrative (Gen 1:28), He is giving humanity both permission to use the natural world and responsibility to care for it. Human beings are to act as representatives for God in their relationship with nature. Thus the term "dominion" does not give humans the right to abuse the earth, but the responsibility to serve and protect it in God's stead. As stewards, human beings are always responsible to God for how the earth and its inhabitants are treated. This concept of stewardship is held in common among some of the most diverse Christian groups. Catholic liberation theologians like John Hart (2006), Mennonite thinkers like Calvin Redekop and Michael Yoder (2000), and Lutheran theologians like Joseph Sittler (2000) all have incorporated the stewardship ethic into their approaches to environmental theology. It is found even in Eastern Orthodox approaches to environmental theology (Theokritoff, 2009).

However, while various Christian environmental theologies share common themes, such as the stewardship ethic, such theologies also vary widely in how these themes are expressed and used, depending on where the theology originates within Christian tradition. For example, the Eastern Orthodox conception of environmental stewardship is deeply influenced by Eastern Orthodox tradition and history. Orthodox theologians understand the Biblical notion that humans are created in "the image of God"<sup>1</sup> within the context of iconographic theology, which leads to very different ramifications than traditional Protestant understandings of that idea. Likewise both Orthodox and Catholic (and some liturgical Protestant) environmental theologies utilize sacramental theology in their approach to the natural world. Catholic environmental theology is also uniquely influenced by an emphasis on social justice, due to the influence of liberation theology. Thus in order to understand the spectrum of Christian approaches to environmental issues, it is important to reflect on the diversity found within the Christian religion and the ramifications of such diversity on how specific environmental theologies are expressed. The diversity found among Christian denominations means that there is no single environmental philosophy or theology held in common among all Christian communities. Although there are pervasive themes, such as the stewardship ethic, the way in which these themes are understood and then practiced within specific Christian communities depends greatly on the history of that specific Christian denomination.

However, denomination is not the only factor that affects a Christian community's environmental ethos. There are also large, cross-denominational movements that affect

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:26-27

how Christians perceive the world. One such movement is the Charismatic movement, which is characterized by communities of Christians who believe that supernatural practices found in the New Testament – such as speaking in tongues, visions, physical healing, prophesy, and exorcism – can still be experienced and practiced by Christians today. While the beginning of this movement can be traced historically to the birth of the American Pentecostal denomination in the early 1900s, it is now a cross-denominational and global movement. Charismatic Christians can be found in virtually every Christian denomination, and around the globe. What unites Charismatic Christians is their emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, both in history and in the world today, and their commitment to charismatic practices. Of course, each of these practices is also understood differently depending on denominational context – a Catholic exorcism might utilize the Eucharist, which might not play such a dominant role, or may be absent altogether, in a Pentecostal exorcism. Nevertheless, a unified belief in the existence and pervasiveness of the supernatural and the miraculous has made the Charismatic movement an incredibly powerful movement within the Christian world.

This orientation toward supernatural beliefs and practices greatly influences how Charismatic Christians perceive and interact with the natural environment. Considering the fact that Charismatic Christians represent a large percentage of all Christians, especially in regions of the world where environmental problems are prevalent, it is important to understand how the Charismatic worldview contributes to an environmental ethos. Such a task turns out to be difficult, however, because Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians have historically remained mostly absent from theological conversations regarding the environmental crisis. In fact, the first theological article

considering a Charismatic approach to ecology was not published until 1988.<sup>2</sup> Also contributing to this issue is a lack of academic studies addressing Charismatic Christian approaches to environmental theology. In recent years, numerous Pentecostal and Charismatic scholars have called for the need for Charismatic Christians to engage the eco-theology discussion, and have worked to develop a uniquely Charismatic approach to environmental issues.<sup>3</sup>

### **Healing the Land Theology**

In recent years, a kind of environmental theology has developed among certain Charismatic para-church organizations. Two organizations in particular have been pivotal in the development of this eco-theology: Partnership Ministries and The Sentinel Group. Both of these organizations are involved in attempting to bring about Charismatic revivals in communities around the world. In the process, they have uncovered what they believe to be a pivotal step in helping a culture receive the gospel: praying over the land. They believe that the land and its ecosystems are negatively affected by human sin, and that as a result, curses and/or demons that operate in the land prevent entire people groups from converting to Christianity. They therefore advocate engaging in a specific spiritual process in order to bring healing to the land, so that they can ultimately evangelize the people. In developing these ideas, these Christians have engaged the field of eco-theology from their own unique Charismatic perspective. This thesis seeks to thoroughly examine this Charismatic approach to environmental theology. Throughout this thesis, I have called this eco-theology "Healing

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<sup>2</sup> In an article entitled "Christ King: A Charismatic Appeal for an Ecological Lifestyle," by Jean-Jacques Suurmond. *Pneuma* 10.1-2 (1988): 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the work of Harold Hunter, Murray Dempster, Steve Studebaker, Amos Yong, Matt Tallman, Shane Clifton, Augustinus Dermawan, and A.J. Swoboda.

the Land theology". This is not a term used by those who utilize this theology in their own religious practices, but is my own term used to describe the theological ideas and practices concerning the environment which are embraced by these two organizations. I will also analyze the development of Healing the Land theology in light of Charismatic history and theology, and historic Charismatic negligence toward eco-theology.

In order to give a thorough examination of Healing the Land theology, this thesis will progress as follows. In Chapter 2, I will present an overview of Pentecostal and Charismatic history, as well as key features of Pentecostal and Charismatic theology. I will also examine why Charismatic Christianity has been reluctant to engage environmental theology until quite recently. This chapter will serve as a framework for examining Healing the Land theology. Throughout the thesis I will show where characteristics of Charismatic theology find new expression in Healing the Land theology, and why, therefore, Healing the Land theology is representative of what a Charismatic approach to environmental theology would look like. In Chapter 3, I will explore the Charismatic context in which Healing the Land theology has developed. This will consist of a description of both Partnership Ministries and The Sentinel Group, as well as a thorough analysis of important *non*-ecothological ideas which are utilized by these organizations. Chapter 4 will begin the analysis of Healing the Land theology, focusing mostly on the *ideas* which make up the theological paradigm. In Chapter 5, I will analyze the *practices* that are the result of such ideas.

This thesis is primarily about a specific kind of Charismatic environmental theology. As such, it will consist of a thorough description and analysis of Healing the Land theology, its core ideas and practices. However, this analysis will also serve as a

case study for examining what a Charismatic approach to environmental theology in general would look like. Thus, in addition to the examination of Healing the Land theology, this thesis is driven by three main questions. First, what does environmental theology look like from a Charismatic perspective? By using Healing the Land theology as a kind of case study, I will point out important features which I believe would exist for most Charismatic approaches to environmental theology. Second, given that Charismatic Christianity has been reluctant to engage environmental theology, how does Healing the Land theology overcome these historic pitfalls? This may illuminate what changes in Charismatic theology or practice would lead to greater awareness and engagement with environmental issues. And third, what does a study of Healing the Land theology tell us about what Charismatic Christianity has to offer the field of environmental theology, and what problems it may also bring with it?

## CHAPTER 2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### **Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements**

In this chapter, I will briefly detail the history of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement, as well as the unique theology of both of these traditions. Throughout the thesis, I will use this analysis to show how various theological aspects of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement find new expression within Healing the Land Theology. Within this chapter, I will also explore reasons why Charismatic Christians have been mostly absent from the environmental theology dialogue, as well as potential benefits of a Charismatic approach to environmental theology.

#### **Pentecostalism**

The advent of Pentecostalism dates back to the nineteenth century Holiness movement, an attempt among certain Methodists to revive the earlier teachings of John Wesley regarding Christian sanctification. The Holiness movement, though popular among Methodists, also spread to other denominations of the time and was thus an interdenominational movement (Quebedeaux, 1976: 33). It stressed the doctrine that Christians were able to achieve full sanctification (life without sin) in this lifetime, and that this state was only possible if a Christian “abandons all efforts and allows the Holy Spirit to live within him the life of Christ” (Smith, 1963: 313). A segment within the Holiness movement believed that sanctification would come in the form of a powerful religious experience (as opposed to a gradual development over time) and would be accompanied by a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit – such as a vision or speaking in tongues. This segment eventually became the Pentecostal movement, which placed tremendous emphasis on the importance of such a religious experience, usually

separate from initial conversion to Christianity, in which Christians were both empowered to live holy lives and in which supernatural abilities or gifts were manifested. This religious experience was referred to as the “second blessing” or “baptism of the Holy Spirit” (Quebedeaux, 1976: 33).

The beginning of the Pentecostal movement is often traced to two events. The first took place at a fundamentalist Bible School called Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas where, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a Holiness preacher named Charles Parham and his students reported receiving the gift of tongues and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. However, while Parham is a significant figure in the development of Pentecostalism, many historians date the true beginning of the movement (especially in terms of theology) to the Azusa Street Mission (Anderson, 2004: 44-45). Here an African-American Holiness Preacher named William Seymour, who had also been a student of Charles Parham, began holding revival services in an old Methodist church in Los Angeles, at 312 Azusa Street (Anderson, 2004: 29). These meetings were characterized by a lack of structure and spontaneity, as well as the manifestation of various supernatural gifts. “Glossolalia, healings, testimonies, shouting, dancing, and other manifestations of religious enthusiasm were an integral part of worship at the Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission on Azusa Street” (Anderson, 2004: 29). Equally intriguing as the displays of religious enthusiasm was the fact that boundaries of race, class, and gender were broken at these services. Black and White Christians worshipped together under the leadership of Seymour, himself an African-American, and more than half of Seymour’s leadership team were women (Anderson, 2004: 40).

This mission became the topic of discussion in the national and international press and people began to travel from all over the world in order to attend services. Missionaries and evangelists report that their ministries were revolutionized by the services they attended, and many started their own Pentecostal centers in various US and Canadian cities, and eventually around the world (Anderson, 2004: 40). Nichol writes that “Azusa street became a veritable Pentecostal mecca to which pilgrims from all over the world came and from which the news of supernatural signs and wonders was broadcast” (Nichol, 1966: 34). Today, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements constitute the fastest growing group of churches within Christianity. According to some estimates, in less than a hundred years “Pentecostal, Charismatic, and associated movements have become the largest numerical force in world Christianity after the Roman Catholic Church and represent a quarter of all Christians” (Anderson, 2004: 1).

### **Pentecostal Theology**

As we will see shortly, the Charismatic movement, which took off in the 1960s, was heavily influenced by the spread of Pentecostalism, particularly by the adoption of key Pentecostal teachings in the mainline, historic churches. Therefore, there are a number of key characteristics of Pentecostalism which we should note before continuing that will be important to our study of Charismatic Christianity and environmental theology. First, and most obvious, Pentecostalism stresses the importance of personal religious experience. A key tenet of Pentecostal doctrine is that there is a second blessing to be sought *after* one’s initial conversion to Christianity, and that this second blessing (Spirit baptism) will be accompanied by works of supernatural power, most notably speaking in tongues. Pentecostalism in many ways was a reaction against the rise of liberal theology in the nineteenth century and what Pentecostals regarded as the

resulting worldliness and dead formalism of the historic churches. Liberal theology developed in conversation with other intellectual and cultural forces of the time, most notably the rise of modern science and empiricism, which demanded that something had to be proved by observation or logical argument in order to be believed. While Pentecostalism rejected liberal theology, it adopted the empiricism of the day by holding up personal religious experience as the standard by which to measure truth. Religious experience was also held up against the more formal traditions and creeds of the historic churches. Pentecostal believers felt that the mainline historic churches were devoid of emotional engagement with God, in the form of the Holy Spirit. Thus Pentecostal worship services were characterized especially by their lack of structure, their spontaneity and enthusiasm, their rejection of the use of creeds and liturgy, and their antisacramentalism. Although they held up the Bible as the source for religious authority, personal experience was really what validated and displayed one's religious commitment. Quoting Harvey Cox, Anderson notes that "the essence of Pentecostalism cannot be understood through 'dogma and doctrines' but through the experience of God, a 'narrative theology whose central expression is the testimony'" (Anderson, 2004: 61).

While this emphasis on religious experience was most often directed to the practice of speaking in tongues, it should be noted that it also included other supernatural gifts such as dreams and visions, healing, and the working of miracles. In fact, Pentecostals stress the doctrine that charismatic gifts, such as those listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, should be in the lives of every Christian believer. This passage reads, "To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the

utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.” Important to our study is the Pentecostal belief and practice of physical healing. In Pentecostalism, sickness and death are understood theologically as the result of the fall of man into sin. Therefore it is reasoned, that because the death of Christ on the cross atoned for this event, his redemption provides Pentecostals with the power to combat illness on a spiritual level. Thus deliverance from sickness “is provided for in the atonement and is the privilege of all believers” (Nichol, 1966: 16). In addition to physical healing, Pentecostals also stress the need for spiritual healing, and sometimes even spiritual deliverance from evil forces and spirits. The practice of exorcism has existed throughout the history of the church, but is especially important for Pentecostal Christians. As we will see in Chapter 5, both practices of physical healing and exorcism are utilized within Healing the Land theology in order to bring restoration to ecological systems.

Pentecostalism also shares characteristics with Christian Fundamentalism, though the two should not be equated. The rise of American Fundamentalism also occurred in reaction to modernism and liberal theology. Fundamentalism was essentially characterized by the adoption of “the five fundamentals of the faith” – biblical infallibility, the virgin birth of Christ, his substitutional atonement, his physical resurrection, and his visible and imminent second coming (Quebedeaux, 1976: 34). Both Fundamentalists and the Holiness movement also stressed the importance of personal morality and thus encouraged Christians to shun “the world” and all

manifestations of worldliness (Quebedeaux, 1976: 34). Pentecostalism adopted the five fundamentals, and also the strict separation from society. “Like fundamentalism as a whole, but even more so because of Holiness influence, the Pentecostal movement created its own ‘society’ and ‘culture’ as a substitute for that offered by ‘the world’” (Quebedeaux, 1976: 32). This Pentecostal culture was strict in its relationship to perceived “worldliness” and thus rejected the use of luxuries, cosmetics, jewelry, amusements such as card playing, alcohol and tobacco.

Finally, there was a tremendous emphasis in Pentecostal theology (as in Fundamentalism) placed on the imminent second return of Christ. This took the form of a belief in premillennial dispensationalism, an idea developed by John Nelson Darby of the Plymouth Brethren in Britain. In contrast to the popular postmillennialism of the Protestant churches, which was optimistic about the potential for humanity to create a just society, premillennialism taught that the world would only continue to get worse until the return of Jesus, at which time He would rescue the Church and deliver judgment to the world. This idea led to an increased emphasis on the importance of evangelism in the lives of every believer – every Christian was called to testify to their faith and to spread the word to non-believers. It also resulted in a general pessimism regarding “non-evangelistic” social action, because it was generally felt that the most important task with which Christians should be engaged was the salvation of lost souls, and that since the return of Christ was imminent, any effort to improve living conditions was ultimately a waste of time. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of spiritual gifts were understood by Pentecostal congregations to be confirmation that they were indeed living in the “end times” (Anderson, 2004: 217-8). These important

characteristics of the Pentecostal movement are found within the understanding of the “full gospel,” a useful term created by early Pentecostals in order to explain their most fundamental beliefs. The full gospel consisted of four basic convictions: salvation (justification by faith), healing, baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the imminent second coming of Christ (Dayton, 1991: 19-22).

### **Charismatic Renewal**

While the Pentecostal movement eventually contributed to the rise of Pentecostal churches and various Pentecostal denominations, it was from the beginning an ecumenical movement, as was the Holiness movement from which it developed. The desire was to see members of all Christian denominations, especially those in the liberal, mainline churches, receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In a collection of essays entitled *Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge*, Walter Hollenweger notes that some of the earliest leaders within Pentecostalism were members of other denominations, such as Jonathon Paul, the founder of the German Pentecostal movement, who “until his death remained a Lutheran pastor and baptized children,” and Alexander A. Boddy, the founder of the English Pentecostal movement and “an Anglican priest to the end of his life” (Kuschel, 1996: 9). Thus Pentecostalism from the beginning contained the seeds of what would become the worldwide Charismatic movement we see today.

While the groundwork for the diffusion of Pentecostal theology into the mainline churches was laid in the 1950s (thanks to the ministry of the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International, as well as the work of Assemblies of God pastor David Du Plessis), this development really took off in the 1960s. In 1959, two members of an Episcopal Church in California received the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the

influence of Pentecostal friends. Although tempted to leave the Episcopal Church and join a Pentecostal congregation, they decided to stay in their parish and eventually the experience of Spirit Baptism spread to other members of the congregation, as well as to members of the clergy. The experience also began to spread to other Episcopal congregations, and prayer groups were organized. Eventually, through the influence of these congregations, and especially through the work of one of the vicars, Dennis Bennett, charismatic practices and the experience of Spirit baptism made inroads in Episcopal, Lutheran and Presbyterian churches.

In Van Nuys, California, the first Charismatic Renewal Fellowship was organized, called the Blessed Trinity Society (stressing the renewed emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity). This organization published a magazine which reported current developments in the neo-Pentecostal movement as well as addressed non-Charismatic members of the historic denominations. It also launched in 1962 a series of teaching seminars regarding Charismatic renewal – called “Christian Advance,” which were also directed at the historic churches. Thanks to the work of these organizations, the Neo-Pentecostal movement (now known as the Charismatic movement) became a topic for the secular and religious press, radio, and television in the 1960s. In October 1962, glossolalia broke out among academic communities – at Yale University, Dartmouth College, Stanford University, and Princeton Theological Seminary. “Four years after its inception, Neo-Pentecostalism was a clearly recognizable religious movement – affecting both clergy and laity, students and professionals, men and women, in the Episcopal Church and almost all the mainline Protestant denominations in the United States” (Quebedeaux, 1976: 59).

In the late 1960s, the movement also spread into the Roman Catholic Church, due to a few faculty members of Duquesne University who reported receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit as well as other charismatic gifts, including speaking in tongues. From here the movement spread to the University of Notre Dame and Michigan State University. What is important to note is that in all of these historic denominations – Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Catholic, etc. – the Charismatic experience did not conflict with previously held doctrinal convictions, but rather complemented them. For example, Charismatic Catholics oriented their practice of Charismatic gifts around other traditional practices such as the liturgy and the Eucharist. Holy Spirit baptism was often associated with the practice of confirmation, which was understood as a renewal of infant baptismal vows.

Since the 1960s, the movement has spread around the world and is a major force in the world-wide Christian movement. The Charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church especially has allowed for the spread of Charismatic theology into predominately Catholic countries in Europe and South America. It has even made inroads in the Eastern Orthodox Church, through the work of Fr. Eusebius Stephanou. The Charismatic movement is one of the key features of World Christianity, what Phillip Jenkins calls “The Next Christendom,” in which the most rapid growth of Christianity is seen in the southern and eastern parts of the globe.

### **Charismatic Theology**

As an interdenominational and global movement, Charismatic Christianity is extremely diverse. However, there are certain pervading characteristics which Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians share. The most important of these is the emphasis on the experience of the Holy Spirit. The first Pentecostals spoke of the

experience of “Spirit Baptism” or “being filled with the Spirit,” an event usually followed by speaking in tongues. The relationship of the practice of speaking in tongues with the experience of Spirit Baptism has been hotly debated among Charismatic theologians, with Classical Pentecostals usually advocating for the “initial evidence” doctrine (Anderson, 2004: 190-195), which claims that receiving the Holy Spirit is always followed by the sign of speaking in tongues. Charismatic Christians in other denominations, particularly the historic denominations, tend to place less emphasis solely on speaking in tongues, and usually do not consider such a gift as necessary confirmation of Spirit Baptism. These Charismatic Christians also incorporate their understanding of the experience of Spirit Baptism with more traditional understandings of conversion and water baptism. Charismatic Catholics, in particular, understand Spirit Baptism not as the initial receiving of the Holy Spirit (as do Classical Pentecostals) but as the release of the Holy Spirit which was already received in one’s water baptism (Anderson, 2004: 195; Quebedeaux, 1976: 131-2).

Regardless of the differences in doctrine regarding the singular event of Spirit Baptism, all Charismatics and Pentecostals emphasize not only the initial experience of the Holy Spirit, but the ongoing experience of supernatural power and relationship with the Spirit in one’s life. They perceive that the Holy Spirit leads and directs their lives, and also interacts with them on a physical and emotional level. “The Holy Spirit is the one to whom credit is given for everything that takes place in many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. The Spirit causes people to ‘receive’ the Spirit, to prophesy, speak in tongues, heal, exorcize demons, have visions and dreams, live ‘holy’ lives –

and generally the Spirit directs the life and worship of these churches, the ‘leader’ of all its activities” (Anderson, 2004: 197).

This emphasis on the Holy Spirit can also be seen in how Charismatic Christians read the Bible. While most Pentecostals and Charismatics associate themselves with evangelical Christianity, and thus render to their written scriptures a high degree of authority, they also emphasize the role of the Spirit who communicates *through* the text to the reader. Anderson notes that “Pentecostals believe in spiritual illumination, the experiential immediacy of the Holy Spirit who makes the Bible ‘alive’ and therefore different from any other book” (Anderson, 2004: 226). The Bible is also understood to contain answers for ‘this worldly’ needs like sickness, poverty, hunger, evil spirits, and so on. Such needs are usually addressed with the conviction that the Holy Spirit is able to heal and work miracles, just as Biblical accounts record. Thus the Bible, especially where supernatural occurrences are concerned, is understood quite literally and is applied to daily life.

Finally, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements are strongly evangelistic and mission oriented. This stems partly from premillennial dispensationalism, described above, but also from the sense that Christians are sent out personally by the Holy Spirit. Early Pentecostals believed that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in places like Azusa Street occurred in order to equip Christians for missionary work, particularly by giving them the supernatural ability to speak in unknown languages. They also understood ‘signs and wonders’ as being important components of their missionary praxis. Thus, missionary work and preaching is often accompanied by healings, exorcisms, and so forth, and this practice has contributed to its tremendous growth, especially among

impoverished communities. Anderson writes that, "Pentecostalism went a long way towards meeting physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of people in the Majority World, offering solutions to life's problems and ways to cope in what was often a threatening and hostile world" (Anderson, 2004: 212). The practice of miracles thus plays an important role, not only in Charismatic churches, but on the mission field. They are understood to be both a sign to unbelievers of the validity of the gospel as well as the natural outcome of the reception of the Holy Spirit by individuals and communities. This contributes to an emphasis among certain Charismatic organizations on revivals and what they call "transformation," a notion which is particularly important for Partnership Ministries and The Sentinel Group and which will therefore be examined in the next chapter.

### **Charismatic Christianity and Environmental Theology**

Compared with other sects within the Christian tradition, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity has been fairly reluctant until recently to enter seriously into the environmental theology dialogue. In fact, the first serious academic engagement with ecological issues by a Pentecostal scholar did not come until 1988, with the publication of "Christ King: A Charismatic Appeal for an Ecological Lifestyle" by Jean-Jacques Suurmond. Conversation among Pentecostal and Charismatic communities regarding environmental issues have been noticeably quiet, if not altogether absent. The reasons for this reluctance are many, and explanations have been given by numerous Pentecostal and Charismatic scholars. Here we will explore three major contributing factors to the reluctance of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians to engage environmental issues: (1) the early Pentecostal alliance with fundamentalism and ensuing distrust of modern science and scientific establishments; (2)

Pentecostal/Charismatic eschatology, mainly the adoption of premillennial dispensationalism; and (3) Western theological dualism.

The early nineteenth century was a time in which advancements in science contributed to the parting of ways between modernists and fundamentalists. It was in this context that Pentecostalism arose and thus the movement from its inception has had to negotiate between these two systems of thought. Fundamentalism arose as a response to modernism, which had especially influenced many of the mainline Protestant churches. While biblical higher criticism was originally the main source of contention, fundamentalism also opposed the theories of evolution and naturalistic origins. Taken together, it was felt that “higher criticism undermined the divine origin of Scripture while evolution undermined the divine origin of man” (Yong, 2009: 94).

While Christian Fundamentalism was the main force in contention with these developments, Pentecostalism remained mostly absent from the controversy. While the two movements share many things in common, significant differences exist between Fundamentalism and Pentecostalism, the most important being the emphasis placed on the work of the Holy Spirit. Fundamentalism claims that the ultimate authority for faith lies in the written word of the Bible. While Pentecostals also consider the Bible to be the authoritative and inerrant word of God, in practice they also place value on personal experience with the Holy Spirit and find authority in the spoken words of teachers, prophets and others who claim to speak and work miracles by the Spirit.

Fundamentalists are usually critical of Pentecostal reliance on experience, and often even oppose the practice of Charismatic gifts as being unnecessary, or even demonic.

However, due to the rise of modernism in the early twentieth century, Pentecostalism began to ally itself more and more with Fundamentalism. Amos Yong notes that this alliance was motivated primarily by evangelistic concerns, as it was felt that the Fundamentalists were more committed to world evangelization than were the modernists. King also notes that Pentecostals came late to the evolution/creation debate because their churches did not face the same threat from it as did the mainline denominations, and only entered into the debate slowly, primarily due to controversy regarding evolutionary theory in grade-school curriculum (Yong, 2009: 101). Regardless of how Pentecostals eventually entered the conversation, they found that their commitment to a literal reading of the Bible also gave them the same anti-evolution bias as the Fundamentalists.

Yong notes, regarding this alliance between Pentecostalism and Fundamentalism, that “otherworldly aspirations combined with a Biblicist mind-set and worldview amidst a fundamentalist milieu to foster an anti-intellectualism among the vast majority of first-generation Pentecostals” (Yong, 2011: 2). This anti-intellectualism led to distrust of both higher education and of the scientific pursuit, and contributed to the reluctance of Pentecostals to seriously engage modern science until quite recently.<sup>1</sup> Because ecological concerns have primarily been raised by those engaged in scientific fields, which are more or less informed by modern scientific theories, Pentecostals and Charismatics have as well been reluctant to seriously engage environmental concerns.

Pentecostal attitudes toward natural science were also influenced by the Divine Healing movement, a separate and earlier movement that came to have tremendous

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<sup>1</sup> See *Science and The Spirit*, edited by James K. A. Smith and Amos Yong, and *The Spirit of Creation*, by Amos Yong.

influence on the birth of Pentecostalism. There are a number of interesting similarities between historic Pentecostal attitudes toward medical science and current Pentecostal and Charismatic attitudes toward ecology, so here we will briefly examine the Divine Healing movement. While numerous advances were being made in modern medical science in the late nineteenth century, members of the Divine Healing movement opted out of many of these benefits, preferring the “healing power of the indwelling and resurrected Christ over that of natural means” (Yong, 2009: 54). Van de Walle notes in his essay “Cautious Co-belligerence?” that proponents of the Divine Healing movement did not always completely forbid (although a few did) the use of modern medicine to treat human ailments. However, they did find the approach of using medicine to be altogether insufficient to meet the deepest human needs, physical and spiritual. Regardless of what advancements medical science offered, they were convinced that these were “fundamentally unable to bring humanity the kind of health and life intended for them by God and found solely in the redeeming work of Christ” (Yong, 2009: 54).

Thus the attitude towards medical science by Divine Healing proponents was characterized by caution. Many felt that the Bible never really gave precedent for the use of medicine, and noted Biblical passages such as James 5 – “Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord” – which seemed to instruct only the use of prayer for dealing with sickness. In contrast to the popular Protestant cessationist doctrine – which claimed that the age of miracles came to an end with the establishment of the Church – they strongly believed that miracles of healing were just as much possible in modern times as they were in the time of the apostles. Thus they enjoined

their members to seek healing from God first and foremost, before relying on natural medicine. Part of their hesitancy toward the use of medicine was due to their criticism of naturalism, which the practice of medical science seemed to presuppose. It was felt that the scientific community assumed people were nothing more than bio-chemical, physical bodies and that, therefore, approaches to solving physical ailments were always strictly natural. The existence of the supernatural and the spiritual aspects of human existence seemed to not only be largely ignored by modern science, but practically denied. This was troubling to proponents of the Divine Healing movement, and they often placed the blame for the absence of miracles in the Western world on this naturalistic mindset. They noted that miraculous events seemed to happen in those parts of the world that had not yet adopted the modernist worldview. A.B. Simpson, founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in the early twentieth century, noted that while medical treatments were “among God’s good gifts,” people with less modern worldviews had greater access to the miraculous. He wrote, “It is not surprising, therefore, that [Divine Healing] comes natural [*sic*] to our simple-hearted converts in heathen lands, who know no better than to trust the Lord for both body and soul” (Yong, 2009: 63).

As a consequence of their rejection of naturalism, the Divine Healing proponents did not believe that modern medical science was able either to diagnose or cure the ultimate cause of disease. This is because they believed the root cause of physical illness was not merely physical, but a manifestation of a greater spiritual problem. Sin was understood to be the ultimate cause of all human suffering. Van de Walle writes that, “Sin, as a force in the cosmos, had led to the disruption of the good created order

and has resulted in the move to chaos and the disintegration of the created order of which human disease is but one manifestation” (Yong, 2009: 63). Thus medical science could only deal with the physical symptoms of this problem and could not address its spiritual roots. Because the ultimate cause of disease was not natural, but rather supernatural, the ultimate cure must as well be supernatural. Thus Simpson wrote, “Christ is the remedy for the Fall, for sin and, therefore, for disease which is the result of sin” (Yong, 2009: 65). Thus along with, and even prior to, exercising the “prayer of faith” for physical ailments, Divine Healing proponents sought to make sure visitors to their healing homes and retreat centers experienced the regenerative and sanctifying work of Christ, seen as healing to their souls. Thus, while most proponents of the Divine Healing movement tolerated the use of medical practices to alleviate physical ailments, they were ever mindful of the shortcomings of such an approach and the ultimate healing to be found in spiritual conversion and healing.

This critique of naturalism is also a main contributor to Pentecostal/Charismatic neglect toward environmental issues. Fields such as Climate Science are perceived to be entirely naturalistic as well, and seem to only come up with very naturalistic solutions to environmental problems. Pentecostal and Charismatic communities tend to focus less on problems found in the natural world, and even less on natural solutions to those problems – opting instead to focus on the “spiritual” ailments afflicting humanity, such as moral degradation. As I will show in the case of Healing the Land theology, when Charismatic Christians do recognize the problems occurring in the natural environment, they also argue against what they perceive to be the naturalistic approach to solving those problems.

A second factor contributing to Pentecostal/Charismatic neglect of environmental issues is eschatology. As discussed above, early Pentecostals adopted Premillennial Dispensationalism, which emphasized the imminent return of Christ to rescue the Church from a condemned world. This notion was pessimistic about the future of the world, convinced that things would only get worse until the return of Jesus, after which he would cleanse the earth through judgment. Murray Dempster argues that this kind of eschatology contributed to a “social quietism” among early Pentecostals. Noting that there were “a sprinkling of ministers” who involved the church in social work, opening up orphanages and hospices, even this concern was often motivated primarily by the desire to share the Gospel, for even “orphans and lepers, after all, had eternal souls that needed to be ‘snatched like brands from the fire’” (Dempster, 1993: 52).

Agustinus Dermawan also connects eschatological beliefs to Charismatic environmental ignorance, noting that the roots of the problem are otherworldliness and pessimism. In many ways, otherworldliness has been a part of the Pentecostal movement from the beginning (Dermawan, 2003: 202), and can be seen in early Pentecostal attitudes toward activities such as smoking, drinking, dancing and card playing. Early Pentecostals had a separatist mindset, and considered themselves to be “not of this world.” Reasons for this otherworldliness are many, including reaction against liberal theology and the “social gospel,” as well as the disillusionment felt after the first world war. In any case, Pentecostals have historically kept their distance from dealing with major societal problems. Spittler even notes that “Otherworldliness linked with experiential individualism makes it nearly impossible for Pentecostals to comprehend the notion of structural or systemic evil... except to say that the Devil

controls unredeemed human society” (Spittler, 1988: 805). Pentecostals are likewise pessimistic regarding human ability to address societal problems, or even the point of doing so. “If the world is getting worse, and if only Jesus at his coming will put it right, the argument runs, there seems no point in trying to reform it meanwhile” (Dermawan, 2003: 204). Pentecostals can even perceive societal problems, especially natural disasters, as affirmation of their conviction that the world is near its end. This especially contributes to outright neglect of environmental problems. Campolo, lamenting this, writes, “Some of these preachers... can even point to a coming ecological holocaust as a kind of ‘good news.’ They see it as a ‘sign’ that the second coming of Christ is at hand. And they greet the news of a disintegrating environment with a shout of ‘Maranatha!’” (Dermawan, 2003: 207).

However, just as Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians have lately begun to seriously engage environmental concerns, they have as well awakened to social concerns. Dempster accounts this “awakening social conscience” to the fact that Pentecostal awareness has been “stimulated by the dire human needs and the devastating living conditions of those to whom Pentecostals often proclaim the good news of the Gospel” (Dempster, 1993: 53). In any case, Pentecostal eschatology reveals what may indeed be at the heart of the reluctance to engage environmental problems – Western theological dualism. Throughout the history of the tradition, Christianity has struggled with dualistic tendencies, which create a sharp division between the physical and spiritual, and pit the two realms against one another. This problem is seen in the early Gnostic controversies which plagued the Church. Gnostic movements sharply divided the human and divine in the person of Jesus, and

conceived of salvation in terms of being rescued from the imprisonment of physical existence. While officially rejected as heresy in the early Church,<sup>2</sup> it has been argued that Western Christianity has continued to flirt with dualistic tendencies.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Anderson writes that “The difficulty with some western approaches to theology is a dualistic rationalizing that does not adequately understand a holistic worldview uniting physical and spiritual, and personal and social...” (Anderson, 2004: 198). Like many forms of Western Christianity, this dualistic rationalizing can be seen in the Pentecostal movement. Because Pentecostalism has been a strongly evangelistic movement, with missionaries traveling to foreign and often impoverished nations, they have had to deal with the tension between leading people to experience spiritual salvation, and meeting physical needs such as food and clothing. Often the argument has been made that it is the salvation of souls which is of primary importance, and that the meeting of physical needs should only aid this spiritual goal. Such reasoning has found its way into attitudes toward caring for the environment, as it is felt among many Charismatics that “Christians need to busy themselves in saving souls, not soils” (Swoboda, 2011: 103). Because of this dualistic sentiment, Swoboda notes that Pentecostal soteriology in the West has largely remained individualistic and anthropocentric.

However, the development of Pentecostalism in the Western world can also be understood as a reaction *against* dualistic tendencies in the Western worldview as a whole. Anderson, quoting John Wimber, notes that the modern Western worldview is dominated by secularism which “assumes that life goes on ‘in a universe closed off from

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<sup>2</sup> See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*

<sup>3</sup> See *Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, by Lynn White

divine intervention, in which truth is arrived at through empirical means and rational thought” (Anderson, 2004: 198). Thus, direct experience of the supernatural is often missing in Western theology. In reaction to this, Pentecostalism holds to a pre-modern worldview in which the supernatural regularly penetrates the realm of the natural. This is seen in the Pentecostal emphasis on the “full gospel” which declares Christ to be “Savior, Baptizer, *Healer*, and Coming King.” The full gospel includes both salvation of the soul *and* physical healing for the body. The God of the Pentecostal movement is a God who cares profoundly about the difficulties of human existence and thus still intervenes in the natural order in miraculous ways. Anderson notes also that, in places where Western culture does not predominate, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity actually lends itself to a more holistic, rather than dualistic, worldview. “The insight shared by Africa and other Majority World societies that life is a totality, that there can be no ultimate separation between sacred and secular, and that religion must be brought to bear on all human problems is their greatest contribution to the West” (Anderson, 2004: 199). While our study will not deal directly with Charismatic developments in non-Western countries, the tension of dualism is pervasive both in the academic literature and in Healing the Land theology, and is therefore a topic which we will return to in later chapters.

### **Potential Benefits of a Charismatic Approach to Environmental Theology**

Having briefly considered three major factors which contribute to Pentecostal/Charismatic negligence toward environmental concerns, I want to end this chapter by considering what strengths Charismatic theology has to offer Christian environmental theology. First, as has already been noted, Charismatic Christianity places emphasis on the validity of religious experience when seeking truth. While

Charismatic and Fundamentalist Christians both tend to read the Bible literally, Charismatic Christians retain a sense of openness toward possible movements of the Holy Spirit, even if similar movements are not found in the Biblical text. Charismatic Christians are more comfortable with the idea that God may do something “new,” in the world, and Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations have at times been at the forefront of major societal changes such as breaking down racial barriers and giving women greater voice and authority in the Church. They are therefore in a better position to welcome the idea that God may be calling the Church to support environmental causes in ways He has not previously. This is exactly what Charismatic scholar Jean-Jacques Suurmond declares in his article "Christ King" when he writes, "I do not hesitate to view this increasing ecological awareness as inspired by the Spirit of God, through whom Christ extends his reign..." (Suurmond, 1988: 27).

This emphasis on experience also informs how Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians interact with the physical world around them. Much Christian environmental theology runs the risk of being detached from lived experience whereas Charismatic theology may place greater emphasis on actual experience with the natural world. This emphasis on experience may increase the awareness Charismatics have regarding environmental problems. It may also cause Charismatic Christians to place a renewed emphasis on relationship with the natural world. Clark Pinnock makes a similar argument regarding Pentecostalism and theology of God. In his article entitled "Divine Relationality," Pinnock emphasizes the effect of experience on Pentecostal theology: "For Pentecostals, theology follows experience, not the other way around. The Spirit-filled community expects to see surprising works of the God whom they know to be

personal, dynamic, and relational" (Pinnock, 2000: 9). Similarly, experience with the world of nature may have the effect of causing Charismatic Christians to perceive of the environment in relational terms. Indeed, Swoboda sees this characteristic as one of the major strengths of a Charismatic approach to eco-theology. He notes, "The experience of relational nearness with God and the rest of creation through the Spirit will provide a focus for a Pentecostal eco-theology" (Wilkinson, 2010: 234).

In addition to an openness toward new moves of God and experience with the natural world, Charismatic Christianity may also offer a more holistic approach to environmental theology. As stated above, the rise of Pentecostalism can be understood as a reaction against Western theological dualism. In particular, it opposes the idea that the physical and spiritual realms exist apart from one another, never interacting with each other. Pentecostalism can be seen as being more holistic, as it integrates the physical and spiritual realms into one ultimate reality. However, even as it does this, it also retains certain dualistic biases, such as the tendency to place greater emphasis on meeting spiritual needs over physical needs. As Pentecostalism has spread to non-Western societies however, and the Charismatic movement has become indigenous in non-Western cultures, even this tendency is beginning to disappear. Thus Charismatic theology, especially when informed by non-Western worldviews, may offer a more holistic theological paradigm from which to address environmental concerns.

## CHAPTER 3 CHARISMATIC CONTEXT

In this chapter we will examine the specific Charismatic theology in which Healing the Land theology is rooted. As was noted in Chapter 2, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements are incredibly diverse. This examination will serve to help illuminate where Healing the Land theology comes from, and the context in which it makes sense. In order to examine the Charismatic theology that forms the framework for Healing the Land theology, I have traced the sources referenced in Healing the Land resources, and focused mainly on the works of specific authors, which are listed below. There are also Charismatic organizations which either produce or espouse the teachings of Healing the Land theology, and so I have also used resources that are produced or promoted by these organizations.

Healing the Land theology has been developed and espoused primarily by Partnership Ministries and The Sentinel Group. These two organizations are concerned with bringing about Charismatic revival in communities around the world. They are especially concerned with confronting what they believe to be hostile spiritual forces operating in societies and preventing people from converting to Christianity. Not only are these forces responsible for resistance to the gospel, but they also contribute to disease, poverty, societal injustice and oppression, political instability, war and violence, etc. The removal of such demons and subsequent conversion to Christianity is thus understood to not only bring healing to individual souls, but to lead to widespread community transformation. Both of these organizations are therefore engaged in what they call “Christian research,” meaning they attempt to investigate the root spiritual causes of societal problems, often finding their source in the worship of pagan deities,

the performance of pagan religious ceremonies, etc. They also have an elaborate understanding of how to deal with these spiritual forces, engaging in what is called “spiritual warfare” and “militant intercession” in order to break the hold of demons over entire societies.

Below is a quick summary of some of the major authors whose theological ideas are utilized by Partnership Ministries and The Sentinel Group, and which have influenced Healing the Land theology. It is important to note that this chapter will not present an in-depth analysis of the origins, history, or applications of these theological ideas, as such an analysis is outside the scope of this thesis. Rather, this chapter will consist primarily of a theological survey in order to orient the reader with key theological concepts and practices which are utilized in Healing the Land theology.

George Otis Jr. is a coordinator for the A.D. 2000 and Beyond Movement and is also the founding director of the World Prayer Center and president of The Sentinel Group, which describes itself as a Christian “research and information agency” which seeks to bring about religious revival in communities around the globe. He is author of *The Twilight Labyrinth*, a book in which he develops a theological understanding for why “spiritual darkness lingers where it does,” why specific communities are either resistant to the gospel or continue to have major problems with issues such as poverty or racism. Central to Otis’s work is the conviction that the Western Christian worldview is lacking a robust understanding of the supernatural realm. Likewise, Charles H. Kraft also argues along the same lines. Kraft is a professor at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary, where he teaches anthropology, communication, prayer ministry (inner healing) and spiritual warfare. He is also president of Deep Healing Ministries and

conducts seminars across the U.S. and around the world related to inner healing, deliverance, and spiritual warfare. In his book *Confronting Powerless Christianity*, Kraft responds to evangelical critics of the Charismatic movement, arguing for the need to recognize and interact with spiritual reality on a regular basis. Kraft is also the author of *I Give You Authority*, a theological manual for using spiritual authority.

C. Peter Wagner was a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission, and is author of *Breaking Strongholds in Your City* and *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*. He is the most widely recognized advocate for what is called “Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare”. His teaching regarding spiritual warfare has been pivotal in the development of Healing the Land theology. Related to the topic of spiritual warfare is a practice known as intercession, which is an intense kind of prayer utilized by Christians engaged in spiritual warfare. The work of Cindy Jacobs concerning intercession is also important within Healing the Land theology. Jacobs is the founder and president of Generals of Intercession, a Charismatic Christian organization devoted to militant intercession. She travels teaching on the subjects of intercession and spiritual warfare and is author of *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy*, a book specifically focused on training Christians to engage in militant intercession.

Central to Healing the Land theology is the desire to bring about Charismatic revivals in many parts of the world. The work of John Dawson is often utilized by Partnership Ministries and The Sentinel Group. Dawson is director of Youth With a Mission in Los Angeles, California and is also a lecturer at international conferences and seminars. He is author of *Taking our Cities for God*, a book designed to train

Christians to break spiritual “strongholds” over cities in order to bring about Charismatic revival.

Throughout this chapter, we will explore the ideas and sources outlined above. Where necessary, I will incorporate other resources from various Charismatic sources in order to give a full description of key theological ideas that undergird Healing the Land theology. However, for the most part, I will limit my analysis to the authors, organizations, and books listed above. This is both because these specific works are widely popular and the authors well known among Charismatic Christians, and because their works are either referenced in Healing the Land theology resources, or by the organizations which espouse Healing the Land theology.

### **The Physical and Spiritual Realms**

In *Confronting Powerless Christianity*, Charles Kraft laments the way in which American Evangelicals have adopted the “Western worldview,” which he says is blind to spiritual reality, as it rejects the belief in supernatural beings and power. He claims, along with all Charismatic Christians, that these assumptions result in a “powerless” Christianity that is “essentially a human, even secular, thing” rather than the Christianity of the New Testament, “something with the marks of God” (Kraft, 2002: 15). Likewise, George Otis comments that Western Christians are more rationalistic than spiritual, and that this deficiency leads to a lack of spiritual experiences among the lives of Western believers. “Western Christianity has clung to its millpond discriminations of reality so tenaciously that it has lost nearly all ability to recognize the spiritual dimension” (Otis, 1997: 64). In response to the prevailing Evangelical worldview, these thinkers purport not only the existence of a spiritual realm, but claim that this “higher dimension” is close, tangible, and bears upon our experience of reality on a regular basis. Otis goes so far

as to claim that the existence of the spiritual realm is supported by modern theoretical physics and quantum mechanics (Otis, 1997: 63), although he neglects any thorough discussion of how extra “spacial” dimensions can be considered spiritual or “supernatural.” What is important to note, however, is that the spiritual dimension is not perceived as being far away or merely a place one travels to after death, or even the site of occasional miraculous encounters. Rather, it is a very tangible dimension of reality, intertwined with physical reality much like extra dimensions of space. Quoting Dr. Francis Schaeffer, Otis writes, “Not only does humanity live in the fold of the supernatural realm... but there is ‘a cause-and-effect relationship between it and our own visible world at every existential moment’” (Otis, 1997: 55). While many Western Christians either deny the existence of spiritual reality or neglect the ways in which the spiritual realm interacts with the physical, both Otis and Kraft advocate for the need to recognize a kind of middle ground where spiritual and physical reality regularly interact with each other.

This middle ground is characterized by the encounter between the material and spiritual dimensions of reality. While the physical world is populated with humans, plants, animals, and inanimate material objects and forces, the spiritual world is inhabited by spiritual beings and forces such as angels and demons. Of special importance is the elaborate demonology which these authors share. The spiritual realm is not only inhabited by diverse demons and evil forces, but it also includes complex structures of demonic power. These authors find support for this idea in the Biblical passage found in Ephesians: “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against forces

of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). Kraft, Otis, and others envision a spiritual world in which demons have differing limits of power – over individuals, families, and communities through various degrees of demonization.

There are also perceived to be complex rules which govern how much power certain demons have over individuals, communities, and entire nations. In fact, there are complex rules which govern how the spiritual world operates in general, and these authors advocate for an almost scientific approach to understanding these rules. In defense of the Charismatic approach to the spiritual world, Kraft observes:

I believe that all parts of the universe - the material part, the human part, and the spiritual part - are governed by God according to rules and principles that He embedded in His creation. Some, but not all, of these principles are indicated in the Bible. The rest are left for us to discover. Since the time of Galileo people have learned that it is profitable to explore the material and human dimensions of the universe. Similarly we are learning to explore the regularities in the spiritual world. (Kraft, 2002: 101).

Kraft goes on to give a non-exhaustive list of rules which seem to govern the spiritual world. Among these are rules which state that there are two sources of spiritual power: God and Satan. Although all power originates from God, Kraft argues that God has set specific limits over the kind of power Satan can wield, and that Satan can therefore “copy, counterfeit, or pervert what God has done” as well as, along with his cohort of demons, hinder God’s workings (Kraft, 2002: 108). Kraft also states that there are specific patterns regarding how human beings access spiritual power, either from God or Satan, as well as how much power God or Satan can exert over the lives of humans. Kraft writes that “obtaining and exercising spiritual power and authority by humans flows from allegiance, relationship, and obedience to whichever master they choose to serve - God or Satan. Either spirit being can invest people, places, and things with power. But each has certain limits related to the cooperation each receives from his followers...

Such rituals as sacrifice (especially blood sacrifice), worship and prayer seem to empower the object of the ritual...” (Kraft, 2002: 109).

Thus, these authors contend that demons can gain authority in the lives of people because these people have, knowingly or unknowingly, given such demons spiritual access/permission, either through sinful activities or participation in certain religious rituals. Interestingly, Kraft and others also believe that demons can exercise authority over the lives of individuals because of decisions made by ancestors, or even because of the geographic location a person resides in. We will return to explore these ideas in detail below. What is important to note is that these authors believe that demons can wield a substantial amount of power, over people and over the world, and that there are very specific and discernible rules for how such power operates, and for how it can ultimately be broken. In the face of mainstream evangelical non-Charismatic opposition, these authors contend that Christians should be engaged in the discovery of how the spiritual world operates, including the rules involved in demonic possession and oppression, in order to undermine them. Charismatic Christians refer to this practice of confronting and dismantling demonic power as spiritual warfare.

### **Demonic Possession and Strongholds**

According to these authors, there seem to be three major arenas in which demons manifest their power: (1) in the lives of individuals through sin or emotional trauma, (2) through generational lines by means of generational curses, and (3) over geographic regions, through human political and/or religious structures and domains. The first kind of demonic influence is the most familiar, even to non-Charismatic Christians, and is referred to as demonic possession or demonization. According to the New Testament, Jesus encountered and cast demons out of a number of people during

his ministry. These authors believe there are three main ways that demons can have access to a person: through that person's sinful decisions, through emotional trauma which that person experienced in the past, or through that person's ancestral line. In the case of sinful decisions, these authors argue that specific sins can open a person up to various degrees of demonic possession. The sins in particular have to be somewhat severe, such as adultery or murder. These acts are believed to create an opening in the person's psyche which the demon is able to inhabit. These Christians call this condition a demonic "stronghold." Demons can also gain strongholds when a person has experienced some form of emotional trauma. The practice of deliverance can therefore involve both repentance over sin and seeking out emotional healing.

Demons are also believed to affect generational lines. They can be inherited through the operation of curses in families. In *Blessing or Curse*, Derek Prince details how these curses work. He points out that often curses spoken against one's ancestors can explain certain troubles a person is currently experiencing. "There may be forces at work in our lives that have their origin in previous generations. Consequently, we may be confronted with recurrent situations or patterns of behavior that cannot be explained solely in terms of what has happened in our lifetimes or personal experiences. The root cause may go back a long way in time, even thousands of years" (Prince, 2006: 36-7). While the vehicle for blessings and curses are most often words, Prince points out that objects can also be blessed or cursed. Therefore, the person who comes into contact with such an object can be affected by either the blessing or curse attached to it. Prince uses the Eucharist as an example. While there are no blessings or curses that are intrinsic to the bread and wine themselves, when consecrated these objects can release

blessings or curses into the lives of those who partake of them – blessing to those who receive the Eucharist in faith, and judgment to those who do not. Likewise, within various cultures, ritual objects are sometimes dedicated to deities. These Christians would identify these deities as demons which have influence over that culture. These objects, then, are able to transfer demonic influence to whoever comes into contact with them. Thus demonic influence can be transferred through the biological inheritance of curses or through the acquisition of a cursed object.

These Christians also believe that demons can have authority over geographic regions. George Otis contrasts two verses from the New Testament – one where Paul describes Satan as the ruler of the kingdom of the air, and the other where Jesus called him the prince of this world. While he interprets the first to mean that Satan and demonic forces have a certain degree of control over the forces of nature, he interprets the second to mean that they also maintain a certain degree of power over human political systems. Quoting Michael Green, Otis notes that demons “interpenetrate the climate of a country, the *Tendenz* of its politics and nuances of its culture” (Otis, 1997: 182). In fact, specific demons are often assigned to specific geographic locations. These Christians believe that the pantheon of gods and goddesses which are worshipped in various cultures are actually representations of the demons which have authority in those regions. For example, Peter Wagner claims that the Sumerian god Enlil is really a demonic entity. Regarding an ancient map of Sumer, Wagner comments: “In the center of the city [Nippur] is written ‘the place of *Enlil*.’ It is said that in the city ‘dwelt the air god, *Enlil*, the leading deity of the Sumerian pantheon.’ We would identify it as the territorial spirit over Sumer” (Wagner, 1993: 20).

These forms of demonic power are understood to answer a variety of questions, such as why a specific individual and his/her family seems plagued by mental illness, why the crime rate is higher in certain populations or regions of a city, or why entire nations are plagued by racism, violence, or poor health. The answer given by these Charismatic authors is that certain demons and demonic power structures have been given authority over individuals, families, people groups and nations, and even the land itself. While the source of illness, oppression, or political instability is often bewildering in the physical realm, there are very clear patterns which can only be perceived when one engages the spiritual realm. These boundaries between individual, generational, and geographic demonization are not well defined, and often these forms of demonic access actually influence one another. For example, demons may have authority over a specific geographic region because of the demonization of past generations who have lived on that land. Thus generational demonization also influences the demonic strongholds over that particular location, and this demonization in turn influences the lives of those who currently live on the land.

### **Dismantling Demonic Power**

These authors contend that, in the spiritual realm, there are complex rules which determine the power and domain of various demonic forces, and that these rules can be accessed by human beings. These rules often involve an elaborate understanding of spiritual authority. Kraft explains in his book *I Give You Authority*, that God originally gave to human beings "authority to carry the image of God, authority to create children in God's image and authority over all creation" (Kraft, 2012: 23). However, Kraft goes on to explain how Satan and demonic forces were eventually able to usurp this authority due to the fall of man into sin. He writes, "All that was under Adam's authority fell when

he fell. His disobedience brought a curse on God's creation and gave Satan authority over all that God had given Adam and Eve" (Kraft, 2012: 23). This explains why demons are able to have control over the lives of people and their families, cultures, and geographic locations. These Christians claim that there are two opposing kingdoms operating in the world: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. However, the death and resurrection of Jesus are understood as restoring to humanity their authority. Jesus is seen as the "new Adam," who fulfills the role that was originally given to Adam. "But Jesus came as Adam came, innocent of sin, and committed Himself to win the battle Adam lost and to show us the way things were intended to be" (Kraft, 2012: 25). When Jesus rises from the dead, he is seen as "establishing His own kingdom in the middle of enemy [Satan's] territory" (Kraft, 2012: 25-6). This act also restores to fallen humanity the authority they were meant to have. Christians, because they are "in Christ," can now exercise the authority God originally gave to Adam and Eve. Thus Christians are now able to engage in spiritual warfare in order to defeat demonic forces. Kraft notes, "Every time we assert our authority we are cutting into the domain of the imposter king who extorted it from our ancestor Adam. And, according to Romans 16:20, it is God's desire that we press on with Jesus until that enemy is crushed under *our feet*" (Kraft, 2012: 26).

Christians are therefore able to use their spiritual authority to cancel the authority that demons have in the three arenas explored above. In the case of individual demonization, these Christians practice what they call "deliverance," also known as exorcism. Where demons gain strongholds in a person's life through sin, Christian ministers will call this person to repent and renounce the evil they have taken part in.

This repentance is perceived as canceling the authority the demon has to dwell in that person, allowing the Christian minister to then cast the demon out. In the case of demons gained through emotional trauma, these authors use a practice known as “inner healing” or “deep-level healing.”<sup>1</sup> Trauma is believed to also create openings in a person's psyche which demons can inhabit. When individuals receive inner healing, which can involve the healing of memories, emotional wounds, and so forth, the foothold the demons had is presumably removed. This, in turn, is believed to substantially weaken the demons, who are then able to be cast out of the person.

Repentance also plays a key role in the exorcism of demons over generational lines and geographic regions. With respect to generational demonic strongholds, these Christians have an interesting practice called identificational repentance which is believed to break the authority of demons that has been inherited. The person afflicted by inherited demonization is asked to repent on behalf of his/her ancestors and to renounce whatever evil they may have participated in. This process of identifying with the sins of one's past generations and repenting on their behalf is understood to break the authority demons have because of biological inheritance. Identificational repentance is also utilized when breaking demonic strongholds over geographic regions. Current residents of a demonized location are called to identify with and repent for past sins which took place on that land. Just as a person has authority to identify and repent for sins in one's generational line, they also have the authority to identify and repent for sins which occurred on the land they reside on. This practice is used by Charismatic

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<sup>1</sup> See *Deep Wounds, Deep Healing*, by Charles Kraft.

Christians who utilize Healing the Land theology when ministering to ecological systems, and so we will return to examine this practice again in Chapter 5.

The practice of identificational repentance is often accompanied by other spiritual practices meant to bring spiritual cleansing in place of the demonic stronghold. Interestingly, the Eucharist is considered to be a particularly powerful ritual when dealing with demonic forces. Demons are perceived to lose some of their power, or even to be exorcized altogether, when the demonized receive the Eucharist. Likewise, individuals who believe they are afflicted by demonic forces because of past transgressions by ancestors can take what is called a “Generational Eucharist,”<sup>2</sup> which is believed to distribute the benefits of the body and blood of Christ to their ancestral line, thereby weakening the demonic forces who have inherited access. Just as the Eucharist can be taken on behalf of one’s ancestors, it can also be taken on behalf of a geographic region afflicted by demonic strongholds. This concept of taking the Eucharist “on behalf of the land” will also be addressed in Chapter 5.

The concept of breaking demonic strongholds over geographic regions is particularly controversial, even among Charismatic Christians. Whereas precedence for individual exorcism can be found in the New Testament, evidence is lacking for the idea of casting demons out of entire regions or even nations. This practice is perceived to encounter some of the highest ranking demonic forces and structures, the “principalities and powers” which Paul refers to in Ephesians 6:12. The practice of dealing with territorial demonic strongholds is referred to as “strategic-level spiritual warfare.” Those who engage in this kind of battle with the demonic utilize a concept called “spiritual

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<sup>2</sup> Generational Eucharists are especially popular among Charismatic Catholic organizations.

mapping." This is the process whereby Charismatic Christians discern what demonic forces have authority over which specific geographic regions. Otis defines spiritual mapping as "superimposing our understanding of forces and events in the spiritual domain onto places and circumstances in the material world" (Wagner, 1993: 32). It can often involve "Christian research" into the geography, history, and culture of a region in order to determine the nature of demonic influence in that area.

Spiritual warfare is also often aided by the practice of militant intercession. Cindy Jacobs, author of *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy*, distinguishes between prayer and intercession: "Not all prayer is intercession. In fact, many people never truly intercede. They simply pray prayers of petition asking God to meet certain needs. True intercession is actually twofold. One aspect is asking God for divine intervention; the other is destroying the works of Satan" (Jacobs, 2009: 59). While all Christians are called upon to engage in basic intercession, these authors argue that specific Christians are set apart specifically as intercessors. These intercessors attempt to remain constantly aware of promptings of the Holy Spirit to pray for specific people or issues. Jacobs writes of the experience: "Many times we will just start thinking of someone over and over and not know why. After a little while we start praying for that person. We may sense danger or feel great sorrow when we think about another person. This is the Holy Spirit's prompting within us. It is at this moment that we stand in the gap, and the heart of God is expressed in intercession. God then begins to move on behalf of the one for whom we have prayed" (Jacobs, 2009: 60). Militant intercession is present in a practice called prayer walking, which is utilized, along with spiritual mapping, by those who attempt to bring healing to land. In Chapter 5, we will return to both these concepts of

spiritual mapping and prayer walking in our examination of how these Charismatic Christians attempt to bring healing to natural ecosystems.

### **Transformation**

By engaging in strategic-level spiritual warfare, these Charismatic Christians hope to ultimately free entire cities and even nations from demonic oppression. In his book *Taking Our Cities for God*, John Dawson notes that cities, like people, have specific giftings and purposes given by God. He writes, "A city is a human institution, and like all institutions it develops a creaturehood or personality that is greater than the sum of its parts. Each metropolis has unique characteristics when compared with other cities" (Dawson, 1989: 40). However, when demonic forces exercise control over cities, they pervert these giftings into abuses. For example, Dawson notes how he believes the city of Los Angeles has been gifted by God in its communicative abilities: "On the one hand, it [Los Angeles] is a technological tower of Babel, polluting the world with its communications and entertainment industry. On the other hand, it is a city with a gift in communications. Los Angeles is a city blessed by God with certain resources that can either be perverted or converted" (Dawson, 1989: 44). Thus in praying for the liberation of cities, Dawson notes the importance of discerning the specific giftings of individual cities. "Determining your city's redemptive gift is even more important than discerning the nature of evil principalities. Principalities rule through perverting the gift of a city in the same way an individual's gift is turned to the enemy's use through sin" (Dawson, 1989: 41).

These Charismatic Christians thus practice strategic-level spiritual warfare, along with the tools of spiritual mapping and militant intercession, in order to bring revival to their cities. They believe that the removal of demons will enable the citizens of a city to

become more receptive of the gospel message. They also believe that such revivals should extend beyond individual conversions, and transform the very social fabric of the city. All the sectors – economic, political, educational, etc. – are able to be transformed by the power of the gospel. As a result, entire cities and even nations can become representations of God's kingdom on the earth. In Chapter 5, we will see how even the ecology is believed to be positively affected within transformed communities. Both Partnership Ministries and The Sentinel Group understand it as their mission to help communities and cities around the world experience such widespread transformation.

### **Organizations**

The two Charismatic organizations which have developed and endorse Healing the Land theology are deeply rooted in the theological notions explored in this chapter. In conclusion, I want to briefly examine both of these organizations and their mission statements. On its website, Partnership Ministries describes itself as a "ministry for the 21st Century Church combining prayer and research that prepares Communities, Cities, Nations, and the Marketplace for Lasting Revival, Authentic Transformation, and the release of the Kingdom Culture."<sup>3</sup> This organization trains churches around the world to prepare for and facilitate the spiritual transformation of their communities. This preparation involves research into the problems which afflict respective communities, as well as the perceived spiritual roots of these problems. Theologically, Partnership Ministries can be characterized as both evangelical and Charismatic. Notably, the organization affirms the Lausanne covenant, which was a 1974 manifesto promoting worldwide evangelization. The main thrust of the covenant is the commitment on the

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<sup>3</sup> [www.partnershipministries.org/about/ministry](http://www.partnershipministries.org/about/ministry)

part of its members to engage wholeheartedly in the program of evangelizing the nations. The covenant ends, "we enter into a solemn covenant with God and with each other, to pray, to plan and to work together for the evangelization of the whole world."<sup>4</sup> In affirming this document, Partnership Ministries works with Churches and other Christian organizations in order to put evangelism into practice.

The Sentinel Group describes itself as "a Christian research and information agency dedicated to helping the Church pray knowledgeably for end-time global evangelization and enabling communities to discover the pathway to genuine revival and societal transformation."<sup>5</sup> This organization was founded in 1990 by George Otis, who also worked with the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. Otis spent the latter half of the 1980's travelling the world, documenting relationships between various cultural and religious practices and societal problems like violence and poverty. The conclusions of his travels culminated in the publication of *The Twilight Labyrinth*. During this time, however, Otis and his organization The Sentinel Group noticed that various communities within what they call the 10/40 window (the latitude which contains the largest concentration of unreached people groups) began to experience religious revivals. Equally intriguing as the spiritual conversions taking place within these communities was the "number of cases in which spiritual revival was followed by rapid improvements in a community's political and social fabric."<sup>6</sup> The Sentinel Group thus set out to document these changes. These studies resulted in the "Transformations" series of videos, as well as several subsequent documentaries which artfully detail the process

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<sup>4</sup> [www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html](http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html)

<sup>5</sup> [www.sentinelgroup.org/about-us](http://www.sentinelgroup.org/about-us)

<sup>6</sup> [www.sentinelgroup.org/our-history](http://www.sentinelgroup.org/our-history)

of transformation undergone in various communities around the globe. We will explore these first-hand accounts of communities which have undergone transformation in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 4 HEALING THE LAND THEOLOGY: CORE IDEAS

In the process of practicing strategic-level spiritual warfare in an attempt to liberate people from the perceived control of demonic forces, some Charismatic Christians have found it useful to pray over natural landscapes. It is felt that in order to gain authority over spiritual forces influencing people groups and cities, one must understand how these very forces have also gained influence over the land and ecology. This has influenced the development of Healing the Land theology, which is espoused by both Partnership Ministries and The Sentinel Group. Many of the core notions of Healing the Land theology can be traced to Winkie Pratney's book *Healing the Land: A Supernatural View of Ecology*. Pratney details how the natural world is actually aware of and connected to the spiritual world, and also argues that ecological systems are affected by human sin. Alistair Petrie, the executive director of Partnership Ministries, expounds on Pratney's ideas in light of his own ministry experience. In *Releasing Heaven on Earth: God's Principles for Restoring the Land*, Petrie details just how human sin negatively affects the land and also how Christians can bring healing to the land by engaging in spiritual warfare. In doing this, Petrie also utilizes the teachings of Emeka Nwankpa, author of *Redeeming the Land*, a kind of theological manual for cleansing the land of demonic influence. Together, these three books form the main corpus of Healing the Land theology, and are our primary sources for the remaining two chapters.

In Chapter 2, we examined important characteristics of Pentecostal and Charismatic theology. Charismatic Christians interact with the world within the context of their spiritual perceptions. Their experience forms a lense through which they see the

world and through which they read the Bible. This is no less true in the development of a Charismatic eco-theology. Thus Healing the Land theology is grounded in three basic paradigms of thought: (1) a supernatural view of the natural world, (2) a Charismatic reading of the Bible, and (3) a conservative ecological theology characterized by the stewardship ethic. In this chapter we will examine these three basic paradigms and how they form the core notions of Healing the Land theology.

### **Supernatural View of the Natural World**

The Charismatic conviction that the supernatural world is real and accessible, and their perceived experience of this invisible realm, greatly influences their perception of nature. While modernism, and what Pratney calls "scientism" (Pratney, 1993: 32), created an impassible divide between the natural and spiritual dimensions, and even at times eradicated the belief in the supernatural altogether, Charismatic Christianity claims that the supernatural and the natural are not realms of existence and experience closed off to one another, but are rather penetrable, and even overlapping. Thus, even the natural world is not limited to physical molecules and forces and their interactions, but is itself affected by and infused with the supernatural. The cognitive divide between "natural" and "supernatural" is really superficial. The two realms of natural and supernatural, visible and invisible, constitute a kind of unified reality. Together they form the entire creation of God, and they are interacting and affecting each other at every existential moment.

This perceived interaction between the natural and spiritual realms means that Charismatic Christians often attribute physical problems to spiritual causes. For example, as we saw in our examination of the Divine Healing movement, the causes of bodily disease were never limited to natural causes. Disease was always ultimately

attributable to the sinful condition of humanity. The needed remedy was therefore never limited to medicine or medical procedures, but also incorporated spiritual practices such as prayer for healing. Likewise, in Chapter 3 we observed that, within some Charismatic communities, problems in the physical realm are sometimes attributed to curses and demonic oppression. This tendency to see spiritual roots behind physical problems is also present within Healing the Land theology. Ecological degradation is understood to be primarily the result of spiritual problems. Pratney, for instance, recognizes the need to adopt a more ecologically responsible lifestyle: "We must all do what we can about oil slicks, better fuel efficiency and helping to save the whales. Read books on recycling. Put a brick in your toilet and a smaller head on your shower. Compost your own garbage... Implement as many ideas as you can to save the earth" (Pratney, 1993: 14). However, he also laments the neglect of the spiritual roots of ecological problems. He continues, "But is this all it means to care for creation? If it all boils down to the merely molecular, we are of 'all men most miserable'... We fail to give to a world under deep threat any real perspective on the current environmental crisis, which at heart is a moral and spiritual problem" (Pratney, 1993: 14-15). In order to address both the physical and spiritual causes of the environmental crisis, Pratney argues that Christians need to recover what he calls a "supernatural view of ecology" (Pratney, 1993: 16).

This "supernatural view of ecology" constitutes a way of perceiving the natural world through a Charismatic lense, which is always cognizant of spiritual reality. Pratney defines this spiritual perspective as one that is open to wonder at the natural world, which is aware of God's love for the earth and the fact that the redemption of nature is bound up with that of humanity. Pratney also writes that he wants his readers to "see a

world more alive with the power and presence of God" than has previously been recognized (Pratney, 1993: 18). There are three basic tendencies which characterize this Charismatic perception of nature: (1) nature is often perceived as being relational; (2) nature is perceived as being aware of spiritual reality and is at times able to interact with the spiritual world; and (3) all of creation, living and nonliving, is understood as being somehow interconnected at a spiritual level.

Within Healing the Land theology, the natural world is perceived as having some degree of spiritual consciousness, and ability to relate. For example, quoting E.D. Buckner, Pratney describes how all of creation is engaged in the worship of God: "The animate and inanimate creation all contribute to the true worship of God. All of creation must worship at whatever level of sentience they possess. Jesus said that if men held back their praise, even the stones might 'cry out' in worship" (Pratney, 1993: 105). Not only does nature worship, but it also responds to God's commands. Commenting on the creation of the world in Genesis, Pratney notes that nature plays more than a passive role: "Rather than creating things directly, God commanded the earth and the waters, themselves His creations, to participate in the creation of even higher structural forms. He sets life in motion distinct from Himself... God commands natural forces directly and can work creatively *indirectly*. Earth and water obey Him. We are not used to this sort of language in the West, but it is the sort of language the Bible uses throughout to describe God's rule over His creation" (Pratney, 1993: 22-3).

Plants especially are understood as being relational. Pratney spends an entire chapter detailing the work of a controversial scientist named Cleve Backster,<sup>1</sup> who attempted to show scientifically that plants are relational beings, with the awareness of and ability to respond to their environment in surprising ways. In his experiments, Backster connected plants to polygraph machines, which are used in lie-detector tests, in order to record their responses to certain kinds of stimuli. For example, Backster claimed that a plant was able to perceive and respond to his thoughts. When he considered burning the leaves of one of his plants, the polygraph presumably was able to measure the plant's response to Backster's violent intentions. He also argued that plants responded to suffering and/or death in both plants and other sentient beings. In what he called the Brine Dump experiment, Backster measured the responses of plants when live shrimp were dropped into boiling water. He claimed that the polygraph machine was able to measure responses in the plants each time a shrimp died. Pratney claims that this sensitivity is found within all living things. "Fresh fruit and vegetables react, mold, yeast, yogurt, amoeba and paramecia, blood, even cell scrapings from the roof of your mouth. So if you crack a fertile egg in your pan for breakfast, does the parsley in your refrigerator know when it dies?" (Pratney, 1993: 124).

Backster also claimed that plants were able to remember the perpetrators of violent acts against other life forms. He hooked up a plant to a polygraph machine while it witnessed someone destroying another plant. Later, when the first plant was placed in the same room as the person who had destroyed the other plant, the polygraph was

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<sup>1</sup> Backster published his work in the *International Journal of Parapsychology* ("Evidence of a Primary Perception in Plant Life," vol. 10, no. 4, Winter 1968, pp. 329-348). Also see *Primary Perception: Biocommunication with Plants, Living Foods, and Human Cells*, by Cleve Backster, 2003.

presumably able to measure a response. Pratney concludes from this experiment that plants must have some form of memory. "It [a plant] will not easily forget what it has seen in your actions, even in your intentions! Even the plants remember who did wrong. Gardens remember cruelty. Trees record rapes. Jungles memorize murders... and murderers" (Pratney, 1993: 125-6). This memory may also explain why plants respond positively to a gardener's care. Pratney notes, "The reverse is probably also true. Plants respond to and remember kindness. Perhaps this is the secret of those gardeners who have the proverbial green thumb... perhaps they love their plants and love their work, and the plants, like the rest of God's creation, respond in kind" (Pratney, 1993: 126).

Finally, Backster claimed that plants reacted most strongly to the death of something human. In particular, he notes the exaggerated responses of plants that witnessed the death of human blood cells when a fellow scientist was picking at a scab on their arm. Pratney takes this to mean that the dying human blood cells were actually "communicating a powerful, painful message to the plant" (Pratney, 1993: 128). He then connects Backster's experiment with the Biblical story of Cain and Abel. After Cain murders his brother Abel, Genesis records that God questions Cain: "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" (Gen 4:10). Pratney remarks that this verse must be interpreted literally instead of just metaphorically. Just as rocks "cry out" in worship, plants and even human cells have voice. He writes: "Millions of dying cells, one hundred trillion voices speak in each unique individual body. Every time a human being dies, it is like the death of the very representative of God to the cells of the creation composing us" (Pratney, 1993: 130).

While the validity of Backster's experiments have been challenged,<sup>2</sup> the conclusions he reached have had serious implications for Christians like Pratney, and for Healing the Land theology. Pratney blames the reluctance to accept Backster's conclusions again on our Western worldview, which he argues tends to look at the natural world as mere collections of molecules and chemical reactions. He comments that the Biblical text "does not let you deal with plants as if *they* were just chemicals..." (Pratney, 1993: 51). In contrast, plants are understood as being creatures of God and, as such, are upheld by His "creative life and power" (Pratney, 1993: 50) while simultaneously they are, as noted above, autonomous and distinct from God, with the ability to respond and interact with God and the world by their own will. Pratney sees Backster's experiments as evidence that the natural world is not limited to random chemical interactions, but is to some degree autonomous and relational. Plants, along with all of creation, respond to the loss of human life. Blood actually cries out, and the creation that witnesses it is affected by it. "Based on what the death of just a few human blood cells did to his agonized plant, think of what a cry of agony must go up from a jungle or forest in a time of war!" (Pratney, 1993: 129). From here, Pratney argues that all of creation is affected, not only by bloodshed and war, but by human sin altogether. He asks, "Is it possible that we live among a hurting creation literally mourning the sin of mankind? Does the earth itself actually weep over what man in sin is doing to the creation, to each other, to God?" (Pratney, 1993: 131).

Nature is not only understood as being relational, but also sensitive to spiritual reality. Pratney claims that animals are often able to see supernatural beings or forces,

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<sup>2</sup> See: Horowitz, Kenneth A., Donald C. Lewis, and Eegar L. Gasteiger. "Plant" primary perception": Electrophysiological unresponsiveness to brine shrimp killing." *Science* 189.4201 (1975): 478-480.

even where humans are unable. "Even in my own limited experience I have seen unusual reactions from animals - personal pets caught inadvertently in some situation where they saw something apparently supernatural that humans in the room had not yet recognized, and slinked out of the room in great distress" (Pratney, 1993: 135). Animals, in particular, are also thought to be able to respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Pratney thinks this is especially true of how animals, even wild animals, respond to Christians who are extremely close to God. He notes events in which wild animals restrain themselves from harming Christians, particularly from the life of St. Francis. "In these birds and animals, who recognize in such men and women the touch of God, is no wildness. It is as if they are saying, 'I'm not afraid of you because you belong to God'" (Pratney, 1993: 136).

Plants, along with all of creation, are also aware of spiritual reality. In particular, all of creation shares a perception of moral reality. This is evident in the response of plants to the loss of blood in Backster's experiments, and in Pratney's conclusion that the land is grieved over bloodshed and other human sins. Pratney asks, "What if even the surrounding environment is linked by an *innate knowledge of good and evil, right or wrong*? What if all the created world, had we eyes to see, is unanimous in encouraging choices for virtue and reacting against wickedness? What if, in other words, the Bible is *literally* true when it says, 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain,' waiting for the 'manifestation of the sons of God' (Rom 8:22, 19)" (Pratney, 1993: 133). This shared awareness of morality constitutes the connection existing among all created things. Pratney is careful to note that this connection is not due to what he calls an Eastern mystical idea that we are all part of God (Pratney, 1993: 45-46), but that we are

"co-creations" under God. He writes that it "is not that we are inherently one *with* God, but that we are creations *of* God. We bear a real relationship to nature – not that we and it are both part of God, but that we are both *co-creations*... [Thus] we really are in some way one with the creation. We share the same 'creation stuff'" (Pratney, 1993: 50). This notion of being "co-creatures" draws humanity close to the surrounding world of nature. There is an experience of the world which human beings share with the rest of the created order. This being "co-creatures" under God also implies a shared spiritual perception of the world. Whatever sense of this spiritual perception is not experienced fully today is due to the introduction of sin into the world by mankind. "If even 'dumb' little potted plants are linked with other created life, might it hold true all the way up? Perhaps it is mankind who by the Fall has lost touch with something the whole creation around him to some degree still shares" (Pratney, 1993: 134).

Thus a "supernatural view of ecology," means that the natural world cannot be reduced to chemicals and their interactions. Nature itself is, to some degree, relational, and has the ability both to respond to God and to humanity. In fact, nature is infused with a kind of moral sense, and reacts against sin and injustice committed by human beings. This sensitivity to the spiritual world and awareness of a moral compass in the universe constitute the connection existing between all created things. Healing the Land theology is grounded in these convictions. It is also shaped by a distinct way of reading the Biblical text. As seen in Pratney's interpretation of the story of Cain and Abel, this is characterized especially by a literal reading of the text. In this next section we turn to examine in detail how Healing the Land theology reads the Bible, and how this informs its unique ecological theology.

## **Reading of the Bible**

The Bible is one of the most important factors which shapes the worldview of Charismatic Christians, and this is no less true when it comes to how these Christians view the natural world and their place in it. There are two main trends which influence how the Bible is read and applied to ecological issues: the first is that, like most Charismatic Christians, the Bible is read in a literal fashion. The second is that the Bible is read in light of personal conviction and experience of the supernatural. When these two trends are combined – a literal reading of the scriptures with a perception of the supernatural – the resulting Biblical hermeneutic lends itself to unique interpretations and applications of ecological passages. Healing the Land theology also utilizes the stewardship ethic, common to many conservative evangelical eco-theologies. However, even the stewardship ethic takes on new meaning when read through a Charismatic lense. Healing the Land theology is rooted in this unique Charismatic reading of the Bible and interpretation of conservative, evangelical eco-theology. In order to see this, we will first examine how the Biblical accounts of the creation of the world, the fall of man into sin, and the redemption of Christ are interpreted in relation to environmental theology. We will then examine how Old Testament passages regarding the relationship of the nation of Israel to the land are interpreted.

### **Creation of the World**

Because the Bible is interpreted literally, the Old Testament is used as a resource for historical and scientific information. This entails a rejection of both the scientifically accepted age of the earth and evolutionary theory in favor of a literal 6-day creation as recorded in the Genesis narrative. This rejection is not only the outcome of a literal reading of the text in Genesis, but also of the conviction that the Darwinian view of

the history of the world is fundamentally at odds with the Charismatic perspective. Pratney interprets naturalistic origins as implying that matter is therefore devoid of anything spiritual or supernatural. He reasons that since, according to evolutionary theory "time + chance + matter = mankind and the universe," this implies that a human being is simply "a bag of complex chemicals reacting to the environment" (Pratney, 1993: 42). In fact, Pratney believes that evolutionary theory implies that there is really no such thing as beauty, truth or love. "Everything is just chemicals and environmental conditioning" (Pratney, 1993: 43). He therefore questions why, if evolutionary theory is true, one would be morally compelled to care for the environment at all. "There is no reason at all, other than a pragmatic one, to care... What do chemicals care about the future, or even their children's future? When you die that's it; you go into the ground and simplify. Just chemicals again" (Pratney, 1993: 44). Pratney also argues that evolutionary theory simply does not make sense of the world around us. While he admits that the evolutionary narrative can account for diversity and difference among species, Pratney claims that the Biblical worldview, understood as young-earth creationism, makes better sense of the law, form, and structure seen in the universe.

In addition to believing that God created the world according to the account found in Genesis, our sources also believe that God created everything in a state of perfection. The Biblical text declares that God created all things "good," and various Christian traditions have varied on exactly how to interpret this declaration. Within Healing the Land theology, a "good" creation entails a world devoid of sin, suffering, and death. It also implies that the natural inclination of all living things toward one another was originally a state of harmony. Pratney describes the kind of unity that all of creation

must have experienced, claiming that the "original law in nature was not tooth and claw, but a very high level of cooperation" (Pratney, 1993: 89). Petrie also writes that, in contrast to the "Western-based worldview," Biblical Christianity "teaches intimate harmony among God, mankind and creation" (Petrie, 2000: 27). This perfection and harmony also extended to the creation of Adam and Eve, the first human couple, who did not experience pain, disease, or death. At their creation, the first humans were placed in a literal Garden of Eden, where they enjoyed an easy, painless existence and unbroken fellowship with God.

These writers also interpret the inherent goodness of creation to mean that God desires to ultimately redeem the natural world along with humanity. Pratney declares that "God *likes* matter. He created matter to bring Him glory. Matter is mysterious but a constant reminder that creation is real" (Pratney, 1993: 50). Petrie laments the fact that Western evangelical Christians have often shown a lack of concern regarding the health of the world, and attributes this to the common evangelical notion that God desires to save Christians *out of* the world, including the world of nature. While he cautions that concern over environmental issues must not lead the Christian to worship creation over God, Petrie counters this other-worldly sentiment:

As Christians we are called not *out of* the world, but *into* it, in order to make a difference as salt and light *to* the world. Part of our concern, then, necessitates dealing with the issues of acid rain, the ozone layer and the pollution of our environment growing at an alarming rate, as well as the ensuing issues of war, famine and disease. As long as we live in this world without being affected by its thinking, such issues bring us down to earth in the way we apply the Kingdom of God here in this world (Petrie 2000, 28).

For Petrie, this notion of the "Kingdom of God" is not limited to the ultimate spiritual destination of believers, but is also a sphere of reality that can be "applied" within the physical world. In this way, the concepts of "this world" and the "Kingdom of God" are

not so sharply separated from one another. The Kingdom of God can actually affect, and even improve the state of life in this world.

In addition to a literal interpretation of the Genesis narrative, openness to the supernatural leads to certain nuances in the interpretation of the Genesis text. As seen at the beginning of this chapter, Pratney postulates that the relationship between animal, human, and plant life may have been very different from how we experience it now. Reading the doctrine of “original perfection” through a Charismatic lens, Pratney speculates that humans, plants, and animals may have enjoyed a perception of and participation in the spiritual world that has since been lost (Pratney, 1993: 134). This spiritual perception may still exist, although humans are at times unaware of it. Pratney refers to the Biblical story of Balaam and his donkey, in which a donkey was aware of a dangerous spiritual presence while his human master was not. Pratney therefore speculates that animals originally, and to some extent today, are aware of spiritual reality in a way that humans can be blind to. All of creation is understood as having been more spiritually aware and connected than it presently is.

### **Stewardship Ethic**

Like most conservative Christian eco-theologies, in Healing the Land theology humans are accorded a superior position of both authority and significance compared to the rest of creation. This is summed up in the notion that men and women were created in the “image of God.”<sup>3</sup> Both the interpretation and the application of this theological concept have varied throughout the centuries, but most Christians have found in it the idea that humankind enjoys, to some degree, a superior status with God when

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:26-27

compared to the rest of the created order. Although God loves all of what he created, men and women are the “pinnacle” of creation and are his most beloved creatures. In many Christian eco-theologies, the “Image of God” also means that human beings have been given the authority to “rule and subdue” the natural world. Within Healing the Land theology, as well as other conservative eco-theologies, this "stewardship mandate" means that, while nature was created without death, it still needed someone to tame and cultivate it. Pratney notes the important role of humans in the development of agriculture and the domestication of animals, understood as a way of fulfilling the mandate to rule and subdue: "All of creation looked initially like a teenager drunk with the joy of being alive. Someone had to give the show some semblance of sanity and order" (Pratney, 1993: 25). Elsewhere, Pratney notes regarding the practice of agriculture, that "such assimilation and control is part of the created mandate on lower life forms. The so-called 'food chain' was established by divine wisdom for the nurture and care of progressively higher life, and culminates in provision for human beings as the earth-keepers under God" (Pratney, 1993: 124-5). Nwankpa envisions human authority as extending even beyond agriculture and animal husbandry: "Man was supposed to be in control of the elements, the seasons, the sun, the moon, the galaxies, everything. And man was supposed to be the master, superior, king and ruler of all these things" (Nwankpa, 1994: 13-14).

However, our sources for Healing the Land theology are careful to note that the authority to "rule and subdue" should not be understood as a license to exploit or abuse the natural world or its inhabitants. Rather, it is a function given to humanity by God to take care of the world in His stead, a responsibility which human beings are ultimately

responsible to God for. Petrie notes, that "biblical stewardship teaches us that we are responsible to God to manage and care for His resources, remembering that they always belong to Him and never to us... We are to subdue the creation and have dominion over it as representatives of the Creator. We are both *keepers* and *preservers* of creation, caring for it in God's name and on His behalf" (Petrie, 2000: 22, 25). For Petrie, the concept of stewardship applies to Christians even beyond their role in the natural world. He argues that the role of a steward defines "our mission as people of God" (Petrie, 2000: 26) and thus extends not only to the Christian's relationship to land and ecology but also to people and society. "Managing" God's resources includes caring both for the natural world and for people, and especially includes the program of evangelization. A faithful steward of God is one who also works to spread the gospel and win converts to the Christian faith. In Chapter 5, we will return to this emphasis on evangelism, and will examine how it is theologically connected to the stewardship of land.

### **The Fall of Man**

According to the interpretation of the Genesis narrative found in our sources, the created order did not remain in its original state of perfection. While humans were originally given authority and dominion over the natural world, and responsibility to steward it justly, they chose instead to disobey God by eating of the forbidden tree. Historically, this event has been referred to in Christian theology as the "fall of man" into sin, and diverse interpretations of the result of this fall abound within various Christian traditions. Healing the Land theology follows conservative interpretations, that Adam and Eve were expelled from a literal Garden of Eden as a result of this decision, that this also severed his relationship with God and, as a result, the entire natural world was

affected by the introduction of sin, suffering, and death. Woman was cursed with pain in childbirth, while man was cursed with futility in manual labor. A curse was also placed on the ground as a result of their decision to sin.<sup>4</sup> Pratney notes the environmental relevance of this passage: "It is clearly an environmental, ecological text. The judgment of God for sin was against the very ecology; the curse came on the environment" (Pratney, 1993: 169). As a result, even the world of nature is not as it was intended to be. It now experiences suffering and death, especially at the hands of sinful humans. It also experiences the lack of fertility which it once had. Quoting a commentary on Romans by William Sanday and Arthur Headlam, Pratney writes that the "very creation on account of the sin of man has been subjected to the curse and has become 'vain' or useless in regard to its original design, having been made subservient to the [now] evil purposes and passions of man" (Pratney, 1993: 192). Nwankpa even argues that the land itself is also in rebellion against God as a result of the rebellion of humanity (Nwankpa, 1994: 91).

Not only was the world of nature negatively affected by the introduction of sin into the world, but human beings as well abandoned their calling to steward the world justly. Petrie notes that this does not mean that people lost their God-given stewardship. He writes: "With the Fall came separation from God, but man's connection with the land had already been established. The so-called 'relationship of responsibility' meant that, for good or ill, human stewardship would have a bearing on the land itself and, once established, would remain embedded until a concerted effort was undertaken to change it" (Petrie, 2000: 116). As a result of the Fall, stewardship was perverted, and humans

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:16-19

took to destroying the earth they were called to care for. Quoting Erich Saer, Pratney writes that "his [mankind's] attitude to Nature, especially in the animal world, is no longer that of original harmony, but a relationship of force, oppression and conflict" (Pratney, 1993: 28). The abuse of the natural world, then, is understood to not be the result of the mandate to "rule and subdue" originally given to humanity, but of the perversion of that very authority.

As we saw in Chapter 3, Charismatic Christians also believe that with the Fall of man the world was opened up to demonic influence and control. These demons operate alongside the curse placed on the earth. Nwankpa notes that, as a result of the Fall, "Satan became the god of this world and usurped the powers that man was to have exercised. Satan expanded his hold over the earth by deploying his principalities and powers to cause and spread spiritual wickedness in this world" (Nwankpa, 1994: 8-9). In this way, the Fall is also read through a Charismatic lense. The introduction of sin made humanity and the world of nature vulnerable to demonic control. Thus problems in the environment, especially natural disasters such as earthquakes and destructive storms, can be understood as demonically created (Pratney, 1993: 193).

### **Redemption of Christ**

Just as the world of nature was negatively affected by the Fall, our sources repeatedly declare that it will enjoy the benefits achieved by the death of Christ on the cross. As seen in our discussion of physical disease in Chapter 2, Charismatic Christians believe that the atonement accomplished in the death of Jesus provides the remedy for bodily sickness. This is not only limited to the present working of miraculous healings, but also refers to the future eschatological age when all disease will be done away with. Likewise, our sources declare that God has not only determined to save

fallen humanity, but fallen nature as well, and that the means for this salvation were accomplished through the death of Jesus. Nwankpa notes that "Jesus Christ came to redeem man and creation for himself. That explains why in addition to being made sin for man, he allowed the soldiers to jam the crown of thorns upon his head to pay for God's curse on the earth in Genesis 3" (Nwankpa, 1993: 9). Pratney makes the same point: "What Jesus accomplished on the cross is more than the doorway back for lost mankind. When man sinned, the occasion of his fall was a tree, and the ground cursed brought forth thorns. When the Lord Jesus died, He died on a tree with a crown of thorns on his head, and He caught up creation's curse with our sin on the cross" (Pratney, 1993: 156).

The redemption of Christ also means that Christians can presently pray for healing, both for bodily disease and for ecological degradation. The authority to proclaim healing and to battle the demonic powers which oppress both people and land has been given back to humanity. Humans can once again walk fully in their God-given stewardship, and care for the environment through both physical and spiritual means. In particular, our sources stress that humans can use their authority to cast demons off of land, what Nwankpa refers to as "redeeming the land." Nwankpa notes, regarding this extension of redemption to all of creation: "It is clear that the blood of Jesus does not only minister to people. Jesus also shed that blood to reconcile to God all things seen and unseen, including the land and the people" (Nwankpa, 1994: 90). He then argues that, because Jesus died to redeem all of creation, the Christian therefore has the authority to "redeem the land." He writes, "He [Jesus] purchased and redeemed it [the earth] by his blood and with his life. And on that basis we can use the principle of our

being joint-heirs with him to redeem the land out of the hold of evil powers” (Nwankpa, 1994: 90).

### **Theology of Land**

Healing the Land theology also relies heavily upon a unique theology of land, based on literal interpretations of Old Testament passages regarding the relationship of the nation of Israel to the land. Petrie goes to great lengths to argue that the land is especially important to God because God has placed something of Himself in the natural world. "Land is important to God because it speaks of Him and reflects His character" (Petrie, 2000: 31). Not only does His character reside somehow in the natural world, but God also uses this as a tool to teach people. "God uses land, in other words, to state His purpose, direction and desire for the lives of His people" (Petrie, 2000: 32). God's creation of land, then, is meant to directly benefit the people who live on that land by revealing Himself. This connection between land and people amplifies the importance of the role of the steward in assuring that nature continues to be able to reflect God's character and will. Petrie also argues that, in stewardship, land represents a form of covenant between human beings and God. Quoting Bruggeman, "land is not given over to any human agent, but is a sign and function of covenant..." (Petrie, 2000: 33). According to Petrie, "land is seen in the eyes of the Lord as 'covenanted community' in which both people and land are intimately connected with God" (Petrie, 2000: 34). While Petrie repeatedly uses examples from the Old Testament in which God enters into covenant with the people of Israel, and where the land of Israel represents that covenant, he also argues that this relationship between God, people, and land extends beyond Israel to other nations. He quotes from a number of Biblical references which describe how God "*placed* the ancient peoples and nations in their respective

lands," how He "enlarged" and "dispersed" nations, how He "*established* all the boundaries of land in the world" and how He "*allots* lands and *settles* tribes" (Petrie, 2000: 35). Thus, the geographic boundaries of all the nations are the areas which God has specifically assigned for the people residing in those nations, and for which these people are responsible to God.

The above characteristics of land also apply to Petrie's understanding of cities. As seen in Chapter 3, each city seems to have a specific charter given to it by God and thus cities, like land, "have unique characteristics that can reflect the character and nature of God in that particular area" (Petrie, 2000: 47). The land and the city are therefore theologically connected. Both are ordained by God and the city shares in the specific mission which God gives to that particular geographic region. The worldview of Healing the Land theology does set humanity in opposition to nature, nor does it clearly distinguish between the world of "nature" and the urban setting of cities. Rather, cities are intimately tied to the ecology on which they are built and, likewise, the health of the land and ecosystems are directly dependent on the behavior of the people who reside in the cities. In fact, as we will soon explore, spiritual curses can operate in cities because of the sins committed on the land centuries before that city was even established. Cities are especially important to Petrie and Healing the Land theology because, as he writes, "The majority of people in the world live in cities" and thus cities "play a strategic role in the liberation and evangelization of people" (Petrie, 2000: 48). Stewardship of land and nature is thus understood to be intimately connected to the ability of Christians to influence the people in a city, and the likelihood that a specific city or people group within a city will accept the gospel. As stated above, the task of the steward is not only

to care physically for the environment, but to also evangelize the people who live on that land, who often reside in cities.

### **Sin and Land**

Because God has given both land and cities over to the stewardship of humans, Petrie argues that when nations rebel, God can in punishment either remove the people from their land or bring a curse upon the land. He claims this as the reason why God allowed Israel to conquer the Canaanites and claim their land for themselves. According to Petrie, the Canaanites were idolaters, and so as punishment, God gave their land over to the Israelites. Likewise, God later brought judgment on the nation of Israel when they too turned to idolatry, allowing the Babylonians and Assyrians to send the Israelites into exile. "Each of these Bible references contains active and intentional involvement on God's part, indicating His geographical and historical jurisdiction over and within the lives of His people" (Petrie, 2000: 36). Petrie continues, "Perhaps the simplest explanation for God's being so involved in the physical positioning and destiny of nations is so that they might seek Him and worship Him as their sovereign Lord, and so fulfill His purposes for them as His people. It seems clear from Scripture that nations are given time to seek and find God, but if they refuse to do this, then He will deal with them accordingly" (Petrie, 2000: 38).

Not only does God remove land from wayward people, but He at times brings a curse upon the land as a way of judging the people in that land for their sin. These curses can inhibit the productivity of the land or contribute to unhealthy ecosystems. Demons can also operate alongside these curses. According to our sources, demons are able to oppress the world of nature because of the original fall of man into sin. Likewise, demons can also gain access to specific regions of land because of the sins

of the people who live on that land. Thus not only is the natural environment aware of a moral order, as explored above, but moral decisions made by humans have a direct effect on natural ecosystems. Pratney declares, "What we believe also affects the very life of the land around us for good or evil. Morals have *ecological* consequences" (Pratney, 1993: 20). Elsewhere, Pratney emphasizes the same point: "When you sin, you do not just sin against yourself. Nor do you sin just against your relationships or against society. You sin against the very core of the creation around you. Your wrong affects everything" (Pratney, 1993: 137).

Petrie argues that scripture teaches four basic categories of sin which will lead to this "defilement" of land: idolatry, murder, sexual immorality, and broken covenants. The sin of idolatry, according to Petrie, is the gravest of sins (Petrie, 2000: 58). He notes Jeremiah 3:9, which states that "she [Israel] defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood" and Jeremiah 16:18 - "I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin, because they have defiled my land with the lifeless forms of their vile images and have filled my inheritance with their detestable idols." The defilement of land includes actual environmental problems and also societal problems. Petrie further claims that this may explain why a part of one community will respond positively to the gospel, while another part will reject it (Petrie, 2000: 38). The "difference in spiritual climate" is due, in part, to the defilement of the land, and this defilement could be the result of differing spiritual beliefs and practices of those residing in the land. Pratney even claims that a discernible pattern might be observed regarding religion and ecology: "Look at the nations of the world that suffer from the greatest poverty, drought, sickness and disease, where ecological disaster seems to be a

constant curse. Then ask yourself this question: *What is the dominant religious mindset of this place?* ...I believe that even a cursory comparison between the traits God says He will bless *in the land* and the traits He says He will judge *in the land* will underline the truth of the Bible: 'Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people' (Prov 14:34)" (Pratney, 1993: 165).

Similarly, Petrie also identifies sexual immorality and violence as sources of ecological problems. He notes Numbers 35:33-34, which states: "Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it. Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell, for I, the Lord, dwell among the Israelites." Both bloodshed and sexual immorality are believed to affect the land and therefore the people who reside on that land. Petrie comments: "Over the years I have often sensed anger or rage in a particular congregation, only to find out later that the church was built on a former site of aboriginal bloodshed" (Petrie, 2000: 62).

Finally, Petrie also argues that broken covenants cause the land to be defiled. Isaiah 24:5-6 states that: "the earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt." Petrie explains that one such covenant which the Israelites broke, according to the Old Testament text, was the Sabbath of the land. In the book of Exodus, God commanded the Israelites to extend the Sabbath rest to their slaves, livestock and land. "For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals

may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed" (Exodus 23:10-12). However, the Old Testament records that the Israelites did not keep this covenant, and did not give the land rest during the seventh year. As a result they were expelled from the land of Israel. Leviticus records: "The land will enjoy its Sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate the land will have the rest it did not have during the Sabbaths you lived in it" (Lev 26:34-35). Petrie notes: "In the Hebrew way of thinking, standing before the Lord on behalf of the land was fulfilling the role of legal representative, in order that God would not have to destroy the land due to the effects of the sin still resident in it... not giving the land its rest was a serious offense before God, because He is a covenantal God and the covenant on the land was to reveal His nature, character and love" (Petrie, 2000: 67).

This understanding of how human sin affects the land reveals a more corporate understanding of sin and human behavior which undergirds Healing the Land theology. In Chapter 3, we observed how these Christians believe that one can bear the consequences for the sins of one's ancestors. However, this is not because they believe that descendants are actually guilty of these sins. Rather, they believe that future generations are negatively affected by the curses that are passed along generational lines due to ancestral sin. Thus, descendants who inherit such curses are really victims in the situation, unfairly bearing the consequences for the sins of their ancestors. Likewise, these Christians do not believe that the land is actually responsible for the

sins of those resident on it. Rather, because the land is intimately connected with the people who live there, it unfairly bears the consequences of these people's sin. Sin is understood corporately: an entire nation, and even the ecology itself suffers from sins committed by individuals. The land, then, is also a victim in the situation, suffering the punishment that is due to those who live on the land, but which it does not deserve itself.

### **Ecological Degradation in Theological Perspective**

Thus according to Healing the Land theology, current ecological degradation is understood as being the result of human sin – sin in general, due to the original rebellion of Adam and Eve and the subsequent curse on the earth, and to specific sins which are committed on specific regions of land. Our sources for Healing the Land theology teach that, as a result of sin, a number of things happen which account for ecological degradation. The first is that Satan and his demonic forces are given access to land through the sins of the people. They are then able to oppress the people and the surrounding environment. However, Pratney notes that, Biblically speaking, not all ecological problems can be attributed to demonic influence. He writes, that "the Bible also attributes at least some of the earth's violent convulsions to the direct judgment of God" (Pratney, 1993: 193). In judgment for sin, God can place a curse on the land and ecology resulting in stunted harvests, droughts, or even natural disasters.

There is also a third way of understanding ecological degradation – the response of the land itself to the sins of the people. Nature is actually given agency within Healing the Land theology. Verses which describe the travail of the created world are read literally. Such verses include Hosea 4:1, 3 - "...There is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land... Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that

dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away." Also Jeremiah 12:4 - "How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? The beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end." Romans 8:20, 22 is especially important within many Christian eco-theologies, as it reveals the apostle Paul's understanding of the future redemption of creation. "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it... We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." Proponents of Healing the Land theology also interpret this passage literally. Creation is literally groaning as a woman in childbirth, awaiting its own redemption. Commenting on this passage, Pratney writes, "I have sometime wondered if the convulsions of nature in disasters like earthquakes, eruptions and floods are the ugly parables of her private pain" (Pratney, 1993: 157). So ecological degradation is understood as the consequence of three things: influence of the demonic, the judgment of God, and the reaction of nature itself. The catalyst of these three consequences is always human sin. However, the question arises as to whether ecological degradation is ever understood to be the result of physical abuses to the land. Is there room in the notion of human sin for "ecological sin" such as the pollution of the environment, intensive agriculture, and so forth? While the damage caused by such actions is not denied, our sources do place greater emphasis on the *spiritual* causes of environmental degradation. This is in keeping with Healing the Land theology's Charismatic background – it is felt that, while there may very well be physical contributing factors to environmental degradation, the really powerful, underlying causes

tend to be spiritual. Petrie notes, "Is it possible that the ecological problems we find in the world today are the fruit of unresolved issues in the land that have never been dealt with properly?" (Petrie, 2000: 30). While Healing the Land theology proponents do support caring for the land physically, they stress even more the need to care for it spiritually, by engaging in spiritual warfare over the land.

## CHAPTER 5 HEALING THE LAND THEOLOGY: CORE PRACTICES

### **Methods for Healing the Land**

According to Healing the Land theology, Christians, as stewards of both the land and the city, have the spiritual authority and responsibility to bring healing to the land. This healing is brought about by a specific process which consists of: consecration, identificational repentance, and breaking bondages/strongholds. These three steps are also aided by the tools of spiritual mapping and militant intercession, as well as by the use of consecrated objects such as salt, water, anointing oil, and the Eucharist. In this chapter we will examine the process by which these Charismatic Christians believe they can bring healing to natural ecosystems. We will also examine the theological connection made between societal transformation and ecological restoration.

#### **Consecration**

The first step in the process of healing the land, as outlined by Alistair Petrie in *Releasing Heaven on Earth*, is for Christians to consecrate themselves to God. Petrie writes, "In order to undertake the healing of the land from God's perspective, there must be no iniquity or uncleanness in our attitudes or relationships. There must, rather, be consecration" (Petrie, 2000: 180). Petrie believes that unholiness in the lives of Christians who are seeking healing for the land could actually prevent the land from being healed. Just as sin is understood corporately, so is the process of healing the effects of such sin. The land is positively affected by consecration and personal repentance within the lives of those who are seeking to heal the land. By first removing sin in their own lives, these Christians also gain the spiritual authority to identify and repent of past sin on the land, as well as cast demons out of that geographic region. 2

Chronicles 7:14 is an especially important verse for this process: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." Petrie comments on this passage: "God states that He will forgive sin in the lives of His people and heal their land *when* they humble themselves and turn from wickedness. Once sin is removed, the enemy has no more foothold or jurisdiction, either in the lives of the people of God or on their land" (Petrie, 2000: 179). Once personal sin is confessed and the people engaging in healing the land have consecrated themselves, they can turn to the next step: identificational repentance.

### **Identificational Repentance**

As we saw in Chapter 3, these Christians believe it is possible to break generational curses by identifying with the sins of one's ancestors and repenting on their behalf. Although those repenting may not be the ones who committed these specific sins, it is felt that the process of identificational repentance breaks the effects of these sins in the lives of affected descendants. Likewise, these Christians also believe that it is possible to identify with the sins committed on their land, and repent of them in order to break off curses. Petrie points out that when Jesus died on the cross, he identified with the sins of the world in order to atone for them. Christians, as followers of Jesus, are therefore able and obligated to identify and repent on behalf of the sin of others. He writes, "When one generation decides to stand in the gap, accept the consequences of the sins of previous generations and appropriate the shed blood of Christ, an end will come to the inherited curse, as well as to the consequences of that curse... Jesus became a curse on our behalf by identifying with our sin and taking the penalty of our sins on Himself - the ultimate identification with sin" (Petrie, 2000: 185). When

Christians identify with such sins, they believe that they are applying the atonement of Christ to those sins. Petrie notes, "The Christian is responsible to apply the blood of the Lamb to any form of iniquity that has taken place on the land" (Petrie, 2000: 187).

### **Breaking Strongholds**

Finally, Petrie argues that identification and repentance of past sins not only breaks curses but also removes any justification that demons have for residing on that land. Thus these Christians are now prepared to cast these demons out of these geographic regions. Justification for this final step is found in Matthew 18:18 – "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." The concept of "binding and loosing" is understood to refer to casting out demons, a reference to spiritual warfare over the land.

Interestingly, this process is often accompanied by the use of symbolic objects: salt, water, anointing oil, and Holy Communion. Petrie writes, "Over the many years I have been involved in the ministry of cleansing and healing the land, there have been times that it was appropriate, for spiritual cleansing in a prophetic and sacramental manner, to utilize the elements of salt, water, oil, or holy Communion, recognizing that at times spiritual cleansing may also involve physical cleansing and the removal of specific objects" (Petrie, 2000: 190). On the use of consecrated salt, Petrie notes that salt "symbolizes in the physical realm an activity or action taking place in the spiritual realm... it is a symbol of incorruptibility; that it preserves people from corruption; that it can be a form of judgment on people and land; that it is a sign of covenant and agreement; and that it symbolizes endurance and perseverance on the part of God's people" (Petrie, 2000: 191-2). Thus sprinkling salt on the land to which they are ministering is understood to release these characteristics onto the land. Likewise,

consecrated water "represents the removal of defilement, the sense of being washed clean, having a thirst for life that is fully satisfied. Water and salt are both used to deal with sin and... to reverse the effect of sin on the land" (Petrie, 2000: 193). Petrie is careful to note that there is nothing "magical" about these elements. Rather, "when used in the power of the Holy Spirit, by His direction, they release the integrity of the Lord into situations so as to remove sin and defilement in the spiritual, and then physical, realm" (Petrie, 2000: 193). An example of how such elements might be used is given in this prayer offered by Petrie:

Father, as we sprinkle this water in Your holy name, deliver this place, deliver this room, deliver this land from all evil spirits, all vain imaginations, and phantasm, projections of all deceits from the evil one. Bind and bid them from harming or affecting anyone or anything as they depart to the place appointed for them by Jesus, there to remain for ever, so that the incarnate God who came to give peace can bring peace. Amen.

Just as consecrated salt and water may be used to rid the land of demonic influence, so too can anointing oil. Petrie writes, "Oil is used in a symbolic way with prayer as a means of establishing God's authority over a person's life or over a geographical area. We use it to reveal the *topos* - the foothold of sin that has caused defilement. Oil establishes the mark of God's authority and sovereignty. So it is that we literally anoint buildings, doorways, windows - indeed, the parameters of the ground associated with the people and places requiring liberation" (Petrie, 2000: 198). Thus anointing oil is used as a way of claiming and consecrating a specific territory to God.

Finally, Petrie notes that Holy Communion, or the Eucharist, is sometimes used in the healing of the land. Petrie writes, "We are finding that when we celebrate the Communion together on the land where sin has taken place, we are undertaking a prophetic act that bears witness in the spiritual realm. Whatever is blemished, whatever

is defiled, is being brought before the Lord by His servants so that the cleansing blood of Christ becomes the final sacrifice required for the removal of sin in that area" (Petrie, 2000: 199). Pratney tells an interesting story of an evangelist to highlight the power of the Eucharist in healing the land. This evangelist was conducting a crusade in a small Australian farming community which was experiencing a severe drought. The drought had become so severe that farmers were close to losing their land due to bank foreclosures. Together with the farmers, the evangelist led them in prayers of repentance and in a service of Holy Communion. Pratney, quoting the evangelist, writes: "'I looked outside the window,' he told me later, 'and the dust was swirling so thick I couldn't even see my car, though it was just a few feet from the window. And then, feeling very much like a fool, I walked out into the choking dust with the men and offered, with them, a little bit of the bread and wine to the ground outside'" (Pratney 1993, 172). This act was understood as releasing healing to the parched landscape. Pratney then claims that within 24 hours there was so much rain that the land produced a crop that year that was almost three times larger than any crop recorded in the history of that area (Pratney 1993, 172).

The use of consecrated elements in healing the land also further reveals how these Charismatic Christians view material reality. Petrie is careful to note that he does not believe these elements have any inherent power. However, when consecrated these physical objects become the vehicle through which the Holy Spirit brings healing to the landscape. Physical reality can thus be infused with spiritual reality, and material objects can become the conduits for supernatural power. As we will see, these

Christians also believe that the world of nature is capable of being infused with the presence of God.

### **Spiritual Mapping and Prayer Walking**

This process – consecration, identificational repentance, and breaking of bondages, sometimes with the use of the elements of salt, water, oil, or holy communion – is perceived to break curses, cast out demons, and bring healing to land afflicted by human sin. This process is also aided by the tools of spiritual mapping and prayer walking. As was briefly discussed in Chapter 3, spiritual mapping is the process by which these Christians discern what spiritual forces have control over certain geographic regions. This discernment often involves research into the history, culture, and religious background of these locations. Petrie gives a detailed discussion of the use of spiritual mapping in regards to "ley lines." These are geographical connections existing between ancient religious sites. George Otis defines ley lines as "geographic continuums of spiritualized power that are *established* - or at least *recognized* - by the early inhabitants of an area... Depending on the culture in which they are found, ley lines may be viewed either as conduits through which spiritual power is transmitted, or as demarcation lines for spiritual authority" (Petrie, 2000: 158). These invisible lines on the landscape form a connection between "prehistoric mounds, camp sites, pre-Reformation churches, castles, wayside crosses, old wells, fords, and some old tracks" (Petrie, 2000: 158-9). Groups of trees, standing stones and stone circles were also found along these lines. Petrie describes how the network of lines forms a kind of grid over the landscape, facilitating the transmission of spiritual power along the connections.

The origination of these lines is a debated topic. Petrie notes that some hypothesize that they are actually intrinsic to the landscape itself. "Paul Screeton, in his survey of ley line knowledge, suggests that as the earth cooled, an intricate grid of geodetic lines was formed, possibly magnetic or gravitational in character" (Petrie, 2000: 159). Petrie and Otis, however, find a more reasonable explanation in the practice of idolatry. Petrie writes, "If we are to consider the existence of ley lines from a Christian perspective, we need to see them as connected with the original idolatrous and pagan stewardship and worship of the land that has never been confessed, renounced and removed in the name of Jesus Christ" (Petrie, 2000: 160). Petrie believes that ley lines may explain the existence of geographic areas that seem to experience great "spiritual contamination" such as "intense spiritual confusion, psychic phenomena, moral decay, physical sickness, marital and family problems or business failure..." (Petrie, 2000: 161). They also explain why people within certain regions are reluctant to accept the gospel. Ley lines thus provide a geographic network which facilitates the control that demons have over the area. "They [ley lines] form a spiritual grid, I believe, that provides 'feeding troughs' from which the infrastructure of the demonic can nourish itself and be granted authority in any given area" (Petrie, 2000: 161-2).

Petrie details how, in July 1996, a prayer team visited Bali in order to cleanse the land and pray for revival. This prayer team noted that, before the coming of Hinduism, the Balinese worshipped a variety of gods associated with nature. During the visit, the members engaged in spiritual mapping and believed that they uncovered ley lines which formed a grid over the island. For example, they noted that "all temples are positioned with respect to a mountain or seaward access; family temples look toward the

mountains, while kitchen and livestock pens point toward the sea" (Petrie, 2000: 165). This orientation of buildings was believed to reveal the invisible ley lines crisscrossing the island. In order to address the perceived spiritual grid that facilitated demonic control over the island and its inhabitants, the prayer team undertook a time of identificational repentance, "dealing with the idolatry and covenants with false gods..." (Petrie, 2000: 165). It was important that this repentance took place at the location of the various temples and sites of worship around the Island. Repenting on-site was perceived to break the power that idolatry at these sites had given to the demons. They also prayed to break the power flowing through the ley lines connecting the centers of worship. As a result, these Christians reported that natural calamities befell a number of important religious sites: "Some weeks later this temple [Ulu Watu] was struck by lightning and burned... In another location in the mountains, following the prayer undertaken by one of the teams, falling logs struck two other temples" (Petrie, 2000: 166). Petrie notes the overall effect that prayer was believed to have in Bali: "...everyone, including the local leaders, noticed a change of atmosphere, with a significant lightening of oppression. The next morning an earthquake shook the island. Spiritual renewal began to take place among some nominal Christians, including the growth of healing and deliverance meetings. Unbelievers showed greater responsiveness to the Gospel" (Petrie, 2000: 166).

The importance of praying on-site is also revealed in the practice of prayer walking. In Chapter 3, we noted the importance of intercessory prayer in the ministry of these Charismatic Christians. Prayer walking takes this practice of intercession to the actual locations which are believed to need freedom from demonic influence. Often, a

group of Charismatic Christians will organize a walk through their neighborhood or around their town, petitioning God for His presence to descend on the community and commanding evil spirits to depart. The action of walking is understood as a way of confronting demonic forces and claiming those regions for God. Cindy Jacobs notes, "In prayer walks you work to 'take the land' for the Gospel or establish the borders of your city. As you walk you are taking back land from the enemy" (Jacobs, 2009: 210). While this practice is often implemented in cities or neighborhoods, it is also practiced in more rural settings in an attempt to bring transformation to an entire region. During the walk, these Christians will often seek answers from God regarding the root spiritual causes of various societal and ecological ailments, often finding the source to be ancient religious ceremonies performed on the land, or acts of violence which occurred in that area.

Both these practices of spiritual mapping and prayer walking reveal the importance of geography within Healing the Land theology. Spiritual entities are connected with the actual landscape – thus certain demons, called “territorial spirits,” can wield control over specific geographic regions. Spiritual power is also connected with the geographic layout of the land. Indeed, these Christians believe they can actually map out the networks of spiritual power onto the physical landscape. Breaking such demonic power, therefore, necessitates actually engaging the geography of the land in a prayer walk. It is not enough to pray from a distance. These Christians believe they need to physically engage the affected topography by engaging in spiritual warfare at the specific geographic locations under demonic control. Thus there is a kind of “rootedness” inherent to Healing the Land theology. Physical location matters when engaging in spiritual practices to bring healing to the land.

Not only that, but the human body also plays an integral role in bringing healing to the land. Again, prayer is understood as being more effective if it is performed on-site. Spiritual warfare is not only accomplished through the verbal act of praying, but through the physical act of walking over the land. Engaging the body with the landscape through the act of walking is perceived almost as physically confronting spiritual enemies which have control over the land. Again, this reveals a kind of rootedness to Healing the Land theology. Prayer is not simply a spiritual practice which takes place solely in one's mind. It is a physical act, which can be performed over the physical landscape through the vehicle of the human body.

### **Ecological Transformation**

In Chapter 3, we explored the idea of transformation that is utilized by many of our sources. While individuals can experience conversion, and entire congregations can experience revival, authentic transformation is believed to affect every sector of society. Notably, this includes the ecological sphere. Proponents of Healing the Land theology believe that, when spiritual warfare takes place over land and God subsequently begins to transform an entire society, the land itself responds positively. On the website of The Sentinel Group, Steve Loopstra documents the ecological changes experienced in various transformed communities. He notes coral reefs that “were once dying are now coming back to life - to the amazement of the scientific world.” He continues: “Once unproductive fields now yield crops of ‘biblical proportions’ in shortened growing cycles. Fifteen thousand caribou suddenly appeared on land that has been rededicated to God. A toxic stream was completely healed and cleansed after people in a village repented of

generations of sin. And the stream remains toxic both upstream and downstream of the village..."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, in assessing whether or not a community has experienced spiritual transformation, ecological healing is one of the criteria which these Christians believe a region must meet. Noting that "change must be evident not only in the lives of its inhabitants, but also in the fabric of its institutions," The Sentinel Group declares that transformation is "dramatic social, political, and even ecological renewal that sets these cases apart from common experience." In the list of characteristics which a community must display to be considered "transformed," the condition is listed: "The natural environment is restored to its original life-nurturing state."<sup>2</sup>

Examples of transformed communities abound across the world. One of the most well-known communities was documented in the first "Transformations" documentary, produced by The Sentinel Group. Almolonga is a city in the highlands of Guatemala. It was once was an incredibly poor community, exporting only four truckloads of produce each month. Christian ministers in the area reported the incredible amount of violence and what they believed to be demonic activity throughout the village. These ministers began to pray for revival and conduct healings and exorcisms in the town. As a result, the documentary claims that 88% to 92% of the residents in Almolonga have converted to Christianity. As a result of these massive revivals, the residents claim that even the land has responded. "Instead of four truckloads a month they now export 40 truckloads of enormous vegetables each week - carrots the size of a man's forearm, cabbages as

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.iftpartners.com/fire-quest/2-uncategorised/40-healing-the-land-part-1>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.iftpartners.com/index.php/what-does-transformation-look-like>

large as basketballs... Some vegetables with a former 60-day growing cycle now mature in 25 days. Even during droughts in surrounding areas the soil in Almolonga is always moist."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, these Christians also claim that the ecology was transformed by the revivals which broke out in Manchester, Kentucky. In a documentary entitled "An Appalachian Dawn," also produced by The Sentinel Group, the town of Manchester is described as a community once characterized by poverty and violence. It was also once known for widespread drug use. However, in May 2004, the local churches decided to march through the city and claim the land for God. 63 Church leaders engaged in identificational repentance during the march, including repentance for their own denominational rivalries. The documentary claims that, as a result, many notorious drug dealers began to convert to Christianity, and corrupt local officials were removed from their positions. The revival was so widespread that in 2007 the city council changed the name of the city to "Manchester: City of Hope." This region is actually the only community in North America considered by these Christians to be authentically transformed. Consistent with the requirements for authentic transformation, the documentary claims that the surrounding ecology has also been affected by the revivals. According to The Sentinel Group, a local national park, called "Kingdom Come National Park," boasts "one of the largest Rocky Mountain Elk populations in the country." They also report that turkey, bear, and deer populations have been increasing.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.iftpartners.com/fire-quest/2-uncategorised/41-god-ends-idol-s-700-year-reign-in-almolonga-guatemala](http://www.iftpartners.com/fire-quest/2-uncategorised/41-god-ends-idol-s-700-year-reign-in-almolonga-guatemala)

In 2008, Manchester city water was even voted the "best tasting water" in a statewide competition. They now bottle their own water, calling it "Hope Water."<sup>4</sup>

There is therefore a reciprocal relationship between the healing of the land and the spiritual transformation of a community. As seen in the beginning of this chapter, these Christians believe that in order to free society from the control of demonic forces, they must attempt to bring healing to the land. Healing the land is perceived to open the door for the Holy Spirit to invade a geographic region, dislocating the evil spiritual forces, and transforming the society. However, just as healing the land facilitates societal transformation, these Christians also believe that the spiritual transformation of a community will also lead to ecological healing. In an interview regarding the production of "An Appalachian Dawn," George Otis describes God as a "divine chiropractor" who snaps the different sectors of society back into alignment – including the surrounding ecology. Thus in the two examples given above, spiritual revival was believed to account for the improvement in ecological health.

### **Eschatology, Evangelism, and Ecology**

In Chapter 4, we observed how the concept of stewardship within Healing the Land theology extends beyond the human relationship with the natural environment. Petrie repeatedly stresses that, as stewards, Christians are responsible to evangelize their communities. However, working to bring spiritual healing to the land is understood as being part of the program of evangelization. In order to make this connection more clear, it is helpful to explore the eschatology which undergirds Healing the Land theology. Like most Charismatic Christian communities, the belief in the imminent,

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.iftpartners.com/fire-quest/2-uncategorised/102-the-march-that-moved-mountains-manchester-kentucky-ben-mutti>

physical return of Jesus Christ plays a pivotal role in the beliefs of Healing the Land theology. According to Pratney, all of history leading up to this final event can be understood as sequences of religious revivals, when God poured out new revelation concerning the redemption of Christ. He notes that in the Protestant Reformation, Christians were reminded "that *God can forgive us from our guilt*" (Pratney, 1993: 173). In the first Great Awakening people learned that "*God can heal us from the power of sin itself*" whereas the second and third Great Awakenings brought revelation that God could heal divisions within society, as the "Gospel brought a mandate of change into society itself with its fallen structures rooted in sin." He continues, noting the Azusa Street revival as being the launchpad for "*two-thirds world evangelization*" and the healing revivals during the birth of Pentecostalism which restored the belief and practice of physical healing and miracles. Interestingly, Pratney sees a pattern to these revivals - that the scope of God's revelation "is widening from the smaller to the greater as God unpacks His multidimensional promise in greater detail." This leads Pratney to his final conclusion - that the return of Christ just might be preceded by a final Great Awakening characterized by "*the healing of megacities and untouched peoples and nations*" (Pratney, 1993: 174).

This emphasis on world evangelization has also led to the belief, espoused by Pratney and Petrie, that God is currently bringing about massive revivals in many parts of the world, and that the return of Christ may very well occur as a culmination of such revivals. Thus, it is imperative to these Christians to continue the work of evangelization, especially in what they call the 10/40 window (the latitude where the majority of un-evangelized people groups still reside), in order to hasten the advent of Jesus. Global

revival and transformation will "release the power of the Kingdom of heaven on earth and will prepare the way for the return of the Bridegroom" (Petrie, 2000: 243). Pratney even sees the current environmental crisis as playing a role in God's unfolding redemptive plan. Regarding ecological degradation, Pratney writes, "Is God up to something in all this? Is it possible that the concern of the world over a problem that cannot be solved without massive return to responsibility and morality is God's platform for the Last Awakening?" (Pratney, 1993: 179). Due to the intimate connection between the land and the city, Pratney and Petrie argue that Christians need to consider their stewardship of land in order to be successful in evangelization. When these Christians are able to bring spiritual healing to the land, they believe that this confronts evil spiritual forces who have had influence over that region, and therefore enables the gospel to be more readily received by the people who live in that land. Environmental stewardship through the spiritual process of healing the land eventually aids the program of evangelization.

### **A Practical Theology**

Throughout this chapter, we have observed the various spiritual practices these Christians implement to bring healing to natural landscapes. Like a farmer meticulously weeding out invasive plants from the garden, these Charismatic Christians tend to the natural landscape by physically mapping out the perceived demonic forces which wield control over the land, and uprooting them through the spiritual practices explored above. Healing the Land theology is thus a very practical environmental theology. These Christians engage the physical landscapes with their own bodies when they practice spiritual mapping and prayer walking. They also utilize salt, oil, water, and the Eucharist in the process of healing the land because they believe that, through consecration, the

Holy Spirit can actually indwell these physical elements, and work through them. They believe that, in order to heal the land, it is important to physically interact with the surrounding environment. In this sense, it shares characteristics with agrarian approaches to eco-theology, although emphasis is placed on the *spiritual* practices through which people interact with the land, rather than *physical* acts such as farming.

Within Healing the Land theology, the Pentecostal theological paradigm concerning bodily healing is actually extended to the natural landscape. Just as Pentecostals anoint the sick and pray for bodily healing, so do these Christians anoint the very land and likewise pray for healing. Just as demons at times need to be exorcised out of human bodies, so these Christians also believe that demons need to be exorcised from the physical environment. Within Pentecostalism, physical healing is sometimes believed to happen as a consequence of conversion to Christianity, while at other times bodily healing occurs as a sign to unbelievers of the validity of the gospel, and thus conversion may sometimes follow as a consequence of bodily healing. Likewise, within Healing the Land theology, praying for the healing of the land is believed to open the door for more conversions to take place. However, these Christians also believe that when people begin to convert to Christianity, and communities experience subsequent revival, the surrounding ecology is positively affected. Thus one testimony in the “Transformations” documentary declared: “When people began believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the vegetables started growing.”

Healing the Land theology is thus also a practical theology in this sense: the process of healing the land is used as a tool to win more converts to the Christian faith.

The Charismatic commitment to the Great Commission is not forfeited for ecological concerns. Rather, the practice of caring for the environment is understood as ultimately aiding the goal of worldwide evangelization.

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

### **Characteristics of a Charismatic Eco-Theology**

Healing the Land theology reflects many characteristics of its Charismatic and Pentecostal roots, and is thus representative of what a Charismatic approach to environmental theology would look like. It is steeped in a thoroughly supernatural view of the world in which nature is understood as being more than natural elements and forces. The natural realm is understood as being infused with the supernatural. Healing the Land theology also utilizes the Charismatic Biblical hermeneutic characterized by a literal reading of the scriptures with an openness to supernatural occurrences. When applied to ecological passages, this interpretative model leads to the belief that the creation *literally* grieves over human sin and injustice. As a result, the world of nature is perceived as being personal and relational.

Healing the Land theology also displays its Pentecostal roots in the emphasis it places on morality. In Chapter 2, we noted that the Pentecostal movement, and the Holiness movement from which it developed, were heavily concerned with the declining morality of the surrounding culture. Early Pentecostal groups were therefore usually separatists, creating their own subculture in opposition to the world around them. They often renounced such activities as gambling, drinking, and smoking. Within Healing the Land theology, this belief in a strict moral order is perceived to extend to the creation itself. Even the natural world is aware of a moral compass in the universe, and can react to the wickedness of humanity. The judgment of God for human sin is understood to extend to the natural world as well. Thus, the suffering that creation experiences over

human sin becomes further impetus for Charismatic Christians to live holy lives, and call others to do the same.

Within many Christian theological paradigms, evangelism and environmental stewardship remain distinct from each other. While Christians may feel called to both evangelize and care for the earth, these actions are not perceived as being related. Many environmental theologians may even become defensive over the emphasis placed on evangelism, noting that the goal of spreading the gospel should not lead to neglect or disdain for environmental concerns. Interestingly, Healing the Land theology perceives of environmental stewardship in light of the call to evangelize. Spreading the gospel and caring for the land are *not* perceived as disparate activities. Rather, responsible stewardship of land, especially in the form of spiritual warfare, is understood to directly aid the mission of evangelizing the nations. In this way, the Charismatic emphasis on the importance of evangelism finds new expression within Healing the Land theology, as a reason so care for the natural environment.

### **Overcoming Historic Environmental Negligence**

Given that historically Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians have neglected to theologically engage the environmental crisis, it is important to note the ways in which Healing the Land theology overcomes these historic pitfalls. First, the historic Pentecostal distrust of science and scientific establishments has often contributed to environmental neglect. Healing the Land theology also shares this distrust of science, as seen in its opposition to evolutionary theory. Naturalistic origins are perceived as being incompatible with a Charismatic worldview. However, Healing the Land theology also utilizes scientific methods in its approach to the natural world. Winkie Pratney was trained as a research chemist, and uses scientific data (such as that collected in Cleve

Backster's experiments with plants) to support his view of nature. Both Partnership Ministries and The Sentinel Group rely on scientific, historical, and archaeological information when they engage in spiritual mapping. While the Darwinian account of origins is still rejected in favor of young-earth creationism, these Christians utilize scientific methods in substantiating their claims.

This apparent contradiction is explained by the fact that these Christians do not perceive themselves as rejecting science per se, but the naturalistic assumptions which often accompany the scientific endeavor. For example, Pratney notes that shared characteristics among animal species does not necessarily imply a common ancestry, unless the assumption is made beforehand that God either does not exist or did not play a role in the creation of the world. However, if one does accept the idea of a God who created the world, then shared biological characteristics just as easily point to a common design which God used when creating animals. Thus rather than ignoring the scientific pursuit altogether, as did many historical Pentecostals, proponents of Healing the Land theology believe that science is good and useful *as long as* it is not based on naturalistic assumptions. They are therefore more open to learning from scientists regarding environmental issues as well, although they disagree with the purely naturalistic approaches to dealing with environmental problems.

The eschatology which undergirds Healing the Land theology is also substantially different than that of many early Pentecostal communities. As we saw in Chapter 2, Pentecostal eschatology was most often pessimistic – there was an expectation that the world would simply continue to grow worse until Jesus finally returned and rescued the Church out of the world. This pessimism and "other-worldliness" contributed to the

reluctance of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians to engage discussions concerning both societal and environmental injustice, as it was felt that it was more important to work for spreading the gospel "while the time is short," than to help fix the world's problems. However, Healing the Land theology is rooted in the conviction that God is currently bringing about massive revivals across the world, and that these revivals culminate not only in conversions but in the transformation of society. Such transformation also includes the improved health of ecological systems. There is therefore a more positive stance taken toward the potential for society, and the surrounding ecology, to experience radical change, although the catalyst for such change is always understood to be the work of the Holy Spirit.

The eschatology of our sources is also more positive regarding the ultimate fate of the created world. They believe strongly that the redemption of God will extend to all of nature. "God has not forgotten His suffering world. One day it too shall experience its own resurrection and be born anew into a full and perfect created glory" (Pratney, 1993: 175). In this sense, Healing the Land theology also breaks away from some of the dualistic tendencies which historically have prevented Charismatic communities from engaging environmental theology. The effect of the gospel is not limited to personal spirituality, but is expected to permeate all of life. Nwankpa declares, "...the freedom Jesus Christ proclaims (Luke 4:18, 19; John 8:32) should affect all of life. And, as his ambassadors to the world today, every Christian must know and understand that faith should influence every aspect of human existence" (Nwankpa, 1994: 11). Thus environmental concerns are not discarded in favor of more *spiritual* concerns. Rather,

because the gospel is expected to affect every part of daily life, the health of the environment is considered *itself* to be a spiritual concern.

### **Potential Strengths and Weaknesses of Charismatic Approach to Eco-Theology**

In conclusion, I want to consider what Healing the Land theology reveals regarding potential strengths and weaknesses of a Charismatic approach to environmental theology. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Charismatic Christians expect to experience the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives on a regular basis. While the Biblical text forms a framework for understanding how the Holy Spirit operates, it is not understood as placing limitations on what God may be expected to do or say. Thus, Charismatic Christians are open to the idea that God may act in a way that is not displayed in the Biblical text, though He will not act contrary to His revealed character. Therefore, Charismatic Christians are in a better position than many conservative Christian communities (particularly Fundamentalists) to accept the idea that God may do something new in the world, and may call Christians to take part in something which does not have historical precedent, such as environmentalism. The Charismatic perspective means that these Christians are more open to the idea that God may call the Church to care for the environment, even if that has not previously been on the Church's agenda.

The emphasis on religious experience also extends beyond their relationship with the Holy Spirit, to the very ecology. By engaging in spiritual warfare over the land, or prayer walking through damaged ecosystems, these Christians are putting themselves in a position to be more aware of ecological problems. I believe this emphasis on experience also means that these Christians are open to actual relationship with the world around them. As has already been stated, the natural world is perceived as being

relational. These Christians talk about the natural environment in ways that reflect an openness to perceive personality behind seemingly impersonal entities. This highlights the insight made by Clark Pinnock regarding Pentecostalism and their relational theology. Charismatic Christians are truly "relational theists" (Pinnock, 2000: 7). However, I believe that this study of Healing the Land theology reveals that this relational theism extends beyond the Charismatic conception of the divine to the natural world. Such emphasis on relationship allows for Charismatic Christians to be more aware, and even compassionate, toward the plight of the non-human creation.

Finally, Healing the Land theology reveals the potential in Charismatic Christianity to overcome theological dualism. These Christians strongly oppose the sharp division made between the physical and spiritual dimensions in the Western worldview. In fact, our sources repeatedly denounce the Western worldview as ignorant of the realities of the spiritual dimension, and the very real interactions between the physical and spiritual realms. Because there is not such a sharp cognitive divide between the physical and spiritual, these Christians do not sharply contrast between attending to spiritual matters such as evangelism, and natural concerns such as stewardship of the environment. Caring for the natural world is understood to be a spiritual act, which can even contribute to the program of evangelization.

Because these Christians expect the supernatural to regularly penetrate the realm of the natural, they are also more open to the potential for material reality to be infused with real spiritual power. They believe that blessings or curses can be attached to physical objects, and that the Holy Spirit can actually indwell and work through consecrated objects such as salt, water, and especially the Eucharist. Likewise, they

envision the actions of their bodies, such as in the act of prayer walking, to have a direct effect on the spiritual world. By “walking the land” in prayer, these Christians believe they are able to release the presence of God into damaged ecosystems. This is perhaps one of the most important consequences of the rejection of dualism. These Christians believe that the natural environment is not blocked from interaction with the divine because of its physicality. Rather, the world of nature can actually be saturated with the presence of God, and it is this interaction between God and nature that is believed to be ultimately responsible for the healing of damaged ecosystems.

However, there are ways in which Healing the Land theology also retains dualistic tendencies. While our sources for Healing the Land theology recognize the ways in which physical abuse toward the environment contributes to ecological degradation, they tend to place greater emphasis on the spiritual roots of ecological problems. In Chapter 2, we saw the same tendency in the attitude of the Divine Healing movement toward bodily illness. While they often did not deny the physical causes of disease, Divine Healing proponents claimed that addressing the *spiritual* cause of sickness was enough to bring physical healing. There was thus greater emphasis placed on the need to repent and seek out miraculous healing than there was on seeking healing through the use of medicine. Likewise, there are very few injunctions to adopt a more ecologically friendly lifestyle within Healing the Land theology. While the need to care for the earth is acknowledged, by far the strongest emphasis is placed on the *spiritual* acts which will bring healing to the land. In this sense, Healing the Land theology falls short of being a truly holistic environmental theology with which to address current ecological issues. It seems to focus mostly on personal morality as the major

cause of environmental problems, and thus still lacks a robust understanding of structural, ecological sin. I do not believe such an understanding is contradictory to the Charismatic worldview. However, because of the emphasis placed on spiritual matters in the *history* of the tradition, the very real physical causes of societal and environmental problems are often neglected.

Perhaps the major reason why the physical causes and solutions to environmental problems are often neglected is that Healing the Land theology is reacting against the perceived naturalism in other approaches to eco-theology. Proponents of Healing the Land theology believe that what has been *missing* in most attempts to address environmental concerns, even within other Christian eco-theologies, is awareness of the supernatural world and its interactions with the natural environment. Healing the Land theology is an attempt to *fill in the gap* by placing heavy emphasis on the reality of the spiritual dimension and its bearing on physical issues. In doing this, however, Healing the Land theology neglects the physical causes of environmental degradation, as well as the effective lifestyle changes which humans can make in order to address the situation.

As this thesis was primarily a historical and theological survey, a natural extension of this study would be to incorporate sociological and ethnographic research into our understanding of Healing the Land theology. I think the study of Christian environmental theology would especially benefit from examining how Healing the Land theology affects the day-to-day lifestyles of these Charismatic Christians. Are Christians who adopt this theological paradigm more likely to be conscious of how their food or clothing choices affect the environment? Are they more likely to drive a more fuel

efficient car, or utilize more ecologically friendly modes of transportation? Although Healing the Land theology itself does not adequately address these issues, I think that it is likely that interaction with the natural world through the practices of Healing the Land theology may put Charismatic Christians in the position to more thoughtfully engage lifestyle choices. I also think it is worth exploring how Charismatic experience with the natural world affects their awareness of environmental issues in general. After praying over land, are these Christians more emotionally invested in the health of local ecosystems? Questions regarding experience with the natural world could also be extended to other kinds of Christian mysticism, outside the Charismatic movement. It would also be beneficial to observe how Healing the Land theology affects the day-to-day operations of Christian communities in respect to the surrounding ecology, as well as the ramifications of this ecological perspective on the global Christian movement as a whole. My hope is that, due to the practical and relational nature of this theology, Charismatic experience with the natural world will help to foster a growing awareness among Charismatic Christian communities of the current threats facing the natural environment, and the need to protect it and work for its future restoration.

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