

CARE FOR THE LAND –  
NOTES ON FAITH-BASED RESOURCES

We have been talking about ways to enhance our caring for the land and our loving connection with its being and beauty and well-being. In addition to the help from oral histories, let us consider the gifts of the ancient faith traditions.

Yet why should we look to faith traditions, because of their complicity in the environmental problems we now face? Lynn White's famous paper in 1970 dramatically accused Christianity of being a major distorter of ecological truth and a contributor to human exploitation of the Earth, especially through literal interpretations of 'dominion' and through emphasis on the 'other world' (heaven) as the supreme center of value.

I suggest a deeper look. The situation may be more complex than we think. At a conference of Episcopal university chaplains in Cambridge around 1980, the sociologist Jeremy Rifkin spoke of the importance of developing a *new world view* - one that would see 'success' as something other than indefinite economic expansion (This economic expansion is now destroying the Earth.) To bring such deep change, Jeremy said, we must look to resources of the spirit. We must involve the value-setting institutions which generally are the churches, synagogues, mosques, etc. - even the apparently unpromising ones that seem centered on private personal 'salvation' - for "there is energy there that needs to be redeemed." In the background and origins of all these traditions are three basic awarenesses that are crucial for present need.

- (1) A reverent awareness of the profound Mystery that pervades the universe - the Mystery that the Abrahamic faiths have called God or Allah but others the Void or Nirvana. From the Mystery flow the energies that evoke and sustain life; and in our human response to this Mystery lies the wisdom that underlies and unites all our faith traditions and gives meaning and purpose to our living.
  
- 2 An awareness and openness to the empowering energies of the holy. The cosmologist, Brian Swimme, speaks rapturously of the energies of the universe - allurements, sensitivity, memory, creativity, life - as powers that we share with the stars. They flow through us as we open and enable us to meet the challenges of our age. In the Christian tradition, baptism is such an empowering, as persons are bathed with the life-giving water and strengthened for service. In this gift of energy there is a healing exchange - for everything is connected to everything else (the New Paradigm). Religiously this exchange is expressed as 'covenant' - our 'Yes' to the holy as we pour out our particular gifts for the healing and peace of the Earth. (Note: the wild beasts and all creatures share in this covenant according to Hebrew Scripture. Cf. Hosea 2:28.)
  
- 3 An awareness of the cosmos as our ultimate home. The ecologist and cultural historian, Thomas Berry, points out in *The Dream of the Earth* how the curvature of space is a welcoming sign that the universe, with all its occasional violence, is

on our side. If humans are indeed at home in the cosmos, then 'heaven' is a transitional state until the Kingdom comes in its fullness as the culmination of cosmic evolution.. 'Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.' The theologian Jurgen Moltmann declares in *God in Creation* that if the universe is indeed an open system, then it is embraced by a transcendent reality and moves toward a future 'beyond negativities'...beyond death and pain. This will be a transfigured cosmos -- what the prophet Isaiah called 'new heavens and a new earth.\* (Isaiah 66:22). Thus as humans once again regain their intimacy with Earth and treasure it for its own sake, we shall be taking care of our abiding home.

\*Translation in the New Revised English Bible

In summary: Seeing the Earth as God's beloved Creation, a meeting place with the divine, can give us the needed motivation and energy for true care and nurture....and for recovering what is still recoverable in the many ecosystems. It will involve a profound change in attitude but can surely happen if we attend to the inner realities of spirit as we do our ecological work. Indeed, unless humans can once more learn to love Creation, we will not find the power we need for the coming transformation.

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Note: One bioregional group that seeks to involve churches and synagogues in placing Earth-directed ministries at the heart of their mission is Chesapeake Covenant Congregations. I invite your consideration of what "CCC" can offer for the present time. (Our website [www.ChesapeakeCovenant.org](http://www.ChesapeakeCovenant.org) )

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