CHAPTER THREE

THE ECOLOGICAL COMPLAINT AGAINST CHRISTIANITY

The ecological complaint is the charge that the Christian faith is the culprit in the crisis. Christianity is the primary or at least a significant cause of ecological degradation. It is so human-centered that it is inherently, or at least has been historically, indifferent or hostile toward nature and, therefore, antiecological. "Man" is the center of all created values for Christianity—it is alleged. The ecological complaint accuses Christianity of advocating the human domination and/or damnation of the biophysical world for the sake of material exploitation or spiritual elevation (a curious contradiction suggestive of Christian diversity, which most of the complainants never notice in their singularly indiscriminate assaults). Consequently, claim the complainants, Christianity should be superseded or abandoned, in favor of a new or another religion, perhaps from the East or traditional native American cultures, or at least Christianity must be radically altered.

These charges are widespread and persistent, though some think they are declining in breadth and intensity. Most Christians who are environmentally involved have heard or read the complaint with dulling regularity, and many accept its basic case as valid. Those, however, who believe that the complaint is a half-truth or distortion of the truth would like to move beyond self-defense to a collaborative offense with the accusers against environmental deterioration. But that goal is not easily reached. The residue of the complaint seems as

environmentally persistent as an oil spill, and new globs keep popping to the surface.

In recent years, the complaint appeared again in a prominent place, the *Time* magazine issue on the Endangered Earth as Planet of the Year. Though in subdued garb, *Time*'s version of the complaint mistakes hypotheses for firmly established facts and displays some of the faded fashions from the late 1960s:

> The Judeo-Christian tradition introduced a radically different concept [from other religio-cultural traditions]. The earth was a creation of a monotheistic God, who after shaping it, ordered its inhabitants, in the words of Genesis: "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the Earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." The idea of dominion could be interpreted as an invitation to use nature as a convenience. Thus, the spread of Christianity, which is generally considered to have paved the way for the development of technology, may at the same time have carried the seeds of the wanton exploitation of nature that often accompanied technological progress.[1]

But the ecological complaint has far deeper roots than popular news magazines. It has scholarly sources and has been a worthy subject of scholarly debate. Oftentimes, the complaint has been called "the Lynn White thesis," but not because this cultural historian was the first or only one to state it. Many others had expressed similar sentiments, sometimes much earlier. Alan W. Watts, for example, contended that while Christianity is not inherently antinature, it is an "urban" religion that fits poorly with nature and has encouraged technological transformations of nature.[2] Arnold Toynbee blamed it all on Judeo-Christian monotheism, which allegedly desacralized nature and which should be supplanted by a once-universal, nature-reverencing pantheism (actually animism).[3] Nonetheless, Lynn White, Jr. was the first to popularize the idea—and popularize it with a vengeance he (or more accurately, his fans) did! The famous Lynn White essay, called "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,"[4] is considered by many to be a classic of environmental literature, almost as well-known perhaps as Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*. "Historical Roots" has been reprinted in numerous books and periodicals—including the handbook for the first Earth Day in 1970.[5] I can see at this moment on my bookshelves six sources in which the essay is reprinted. The thesis has been popular and widely accepted as "gospel."

What is Lynn White's version of the ecological complaint? White

(incidentally, "a churchman") argued that the distinctive Western tradition of modern technology and science is "deeply conditioned," historically and presently, by Christian beliefs. Despite the claim that contemporary North Americans are living in a post-Christian age, the traditional substance of Christian values remains the same in our culture. We continue to live in a context of "Christian axioms," like "perpetual progress"—which, contrary to White, is widely regarded by Christian theologians as a heresy. Primarily but not exclusively in its Western forms (specifically, Roman Catholic and Puritan Protestantism), Christianity is "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen," since it operates on the assumption that "God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes." Modern science and technology, which operate on assumptions about the mastery and exploitation of nature, emerge out of Christian attitudes that are almost universally held by Christians. Christianity bears "a huge burden of guilt" for our crisis, and "we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man." White concludes by calling for the value of ecological egalitarianism, "the democracy of all God's creatures," allegedly following St. Francis who should be the patron saint of ecologists. Since the root of the crisis is religious, the remedy must be essentially religious, particularly a reformed Christianity (a point that many of White's fans fail to emphasize).[6]

White's original thesis has been repeated often and by many, sometimes far more harshly and unambiguously than White himself expressed it. Consequently, the effects of the allegations have been multiplied. One example is Donald Worster's claims about "Christian pastoralism" in his justly celebrated history of the science of ecology, *Nature's Economy.*

Worster berates "Christian pastoralism," which he says is quite unlike the classical arcadian pastoralism with its emphasis on the simple moral life in peace with the earth and its creatures. In contrast, Christian pastoralism allegedly idealizes the role of the Good Shepherd in relation to his flock of faithful believers, defending them against the hostile forces of nature—wolves, lions, bears—and leading them to greener pastures.[7] He argues, using White as an authority:

> This second variety of pastoralism illustrates nicely what observers have long noticed about Christianity (and its Judaic background): of all the major religions in the world, it has been the most insistently anti-natural. In the mind of the average Christian, argues historian Lynn White, Jr., nature's chief function is to serve man's needs. In extreme cases, nature is seen as the source of demonic threats, fleshly appetites, and animal instincts that must be rigorously repressed. No religion, this authority on the medieval period believes, has been more anthropocentric. None has been more rigid in excluding all but man from the realm of divine grace and in denying any moral obligation to the lower species. . . . This general animus against nature in Christianity seems to have been most pronounced in Roman Catholicism and, ironically, in its arch opponent on so many other matters, the Puritan wing of Protestantism. Christian apologists in recent years have sometimes pointed to one outstanding exception: [St. Francis]. . . . But such rare exceptions have not disproved the essential truth in the observation that Christianity has maintained a calculated indifference, if not antagonism, toward nature. The good shepherd, the heroic benefactor of man, has almost never been concerned with leading his flock to a broad reverence for life. His pastoral duties have been limited to ensuring the welfare of his human charges, often in the face of a nature that has been seen as corrupt and predatory.[8]

A virtual tradition of responding to Lynn White has emerged among Christian professionals writing on environmental concerns. White has been a prime provocateur, goading some theologians and ethicists to become "defenders of the faith" or, more frequently, critics and reformers of the church, who often are the true defenders of the faith. He awakened many of us from our doldrums. It is probably true that "White's paper, perhaps more than any other single factor, was responsible for making the Creation and the need for its stewardly care an issue in the Christian press."[9] If so, that fact alone means that the churches owe Lynn White a profound debt of gratitude.

I have no desire here to follow in this tradition of responding to Lynn White. In some respects, that would be anachronistic, perpetuating and duplicating the now-hackneyed harangues of yesteryear. Nevertheless, the ecological complaint against Christianity persists, and it demands ongoing responses to new versions if Christians and their churches are to interpret their faith soundly and to have credibility and pride of place in the circles of environmentalists. The issues are part of an ethos, not a single essay, and the necessary responses are far more numerous and complicated than can be expressed in this chapter. They will require the contributions from many of the broadly-defined theological disciplines, including systematics, social ethics, sociology of religion, biblical studies, and church history. Nevertheless, perhaps I can add here some different touches and angles that will prompt deeper research.

A CONFESSION OF SIN

A satisfactory response to the ecological complaint against Christianity must begin with a forthright confession that at least much of the complaint is essentially true. Christianity does bear part of the burden of guilt for our ecological crisis. Ongoing repentance is warranted. It will not do to draw a neat distinction between Christianity and Christendom, between the faith itself and perversions of it by its practitioners.[10] That distinction may be formally or logically true, as I agree, but it is facile and unconvincing when applied to history. We cannot so easily distinguish between the faith and the faithful. The fact is that Christianity—*as interpreted and affirmed* by billions of its adherents over the centuries and in official doctrines and theological exegeses—has been ecologically tainted. A normative Tradition exists formally (as we all assume in our efforts to articulate it), but the practical reality is that the historical traditions have disagreed on what that normative Tradition is. Moreover, even the sourcebook of that Tradition, the Bible, has treated ecological relationships peripherally and pluralistically. The bottom line is that Christianity itself cannot escape an indictment for ecological negligence and abuse. Functionally, a few alleged "Christian axioms" have been part of the problem, while other, more central ones have been neglected.

Ecological concerns have rarely been a prominent, let alone a dominant, feature in Christian theory and practice. That is true in both the so-called Eastern and Western churches, though less so in the former. In the mainstream traditions in the West, Protestant and Catholic, the ecosphere has generally been perceived as theologically and ethically trivial, if even relevant. The biophysical world has been treated either as the scenery or stage for the divine-human drama, which usually alone has redemptive significance, or as a composite of "things," which have no significant meaning or value beyond their utility for human interests—aesthetic, scientific, recreational, but mostly economic interests, particularly human production and consumption.

For most theologians—Augustine to Luther, Aquinas to Barth, and the bulk of others in between and before and after—the theological focus has been on sin and salvation, the fall and redemption, the divine-human relationship over against the biophysical world as a whole. The focus has been overwhelmingly on human history to the neglect of natural history, even to the point of forgetting the profound influences that natural history exercises on human history. This focus

has often been associated with significant dichotomies in Christian attitudes toward the "world": body and soul, material and spiritual, nature and supernature, nature and humanity, secular and sacred, creation and redemption, even female and male—the latter usually being the superior, and the interdependencies poorly understood.

The radically ascetic *contemptus mundi* tradition, with its obsession for the salvation of the soul and its disdain for biophysical realities, carried this dualism to extremes. Though most Christian thought in the Middle Ages accepted the concept of the Great Chain of Being, with its emphases on the plenitude, continuity, and hierarchy of creation, that tradition contained conflicting tendencies, one on ascent to the Creator and the other on immersion in the creation. Most Christian spiritual writers stressed the former. Thus, while formally valuing the hierarchy of being, they were functionally dualistic—focusing on contemplation of the divine and advocating withdrawal from the biophysical world.[11] *Contemptus mundi* can hardly be blamed for direct environmental abuse or overuse, but its indirect effects were serious: it dismissed the theological and ethical relevance of the biophysical world from which it was alienated, and thereby gave tacit (rarely explicit) permission for environmental destruction to proceed as an ultimately and morally immaterial matter.

The sin of omission is evident in the *contemptus mundi* tradition, but this sin cannot be restricted to that strain of Christianity. *Contemptus mundi* represents an extreme form of a dualism that is present in different degrees in most historical strains of Christian thought and practice—a dualism that has neglected or negated nature, a dualism that has been an ecological sin of omission, and a dualism that has contributed to and/or often sanctioned various ecological sins of commission.

These ecological sins of omission and commission continue into the present. For instance, only during the last thirty or so years has an ecological concern arisen with some visibility among modern Christian theologians and ethicists, and then only among a small minority, some of whom still argue from a strictly anthropocentric base. Today, for the bulk of Christian theologians and ethicists, ecological consciousness and concern remain relatively minor. Fortunately, the situation is now improving, but Paul Santmire's description of the theological times seems to me to be still close to accurate: "According to a large number of contemporary Christian writers . . . Christian theology never has had, nor should it have, a substantial ecological dimension. These

writers are convinced that Christian theology must focus primarily—even exclusively—on human history, not on the history of nature."[12]

Historically and presently, the theological mainstreams, though by no means every tributary or every element in the mainstreams, have displayed, as Donald Worster charges, "a calculated indifference, if not antagonism, toward nature." Anthropocentrism has been and remains a norm in the dominant strains of Christian theology and piety, and it has served as both a stimulus and a rationalization for environmental destruction in Christian-influenced cultures. Again, Paul Santmire seems to be on target: "In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Protestant theology by and large washed its hands of nature . . . and thereby gave the spirit of modern industrialism its de facto permission—sometimes its de jure encouragement—to work its will on nature."[13] I would add only that the same description seems applicable also to Roman Catholic and Orthodox theology and ethics.

The central thrust of the ecological complaint against Christianity, therefore, should not be discounted. Christianity has done too little to discourage and too much to encourage the exploitation of nature. Though it is no comfort, it is still worthy of note that humans were often not treated much better than other animals in most periods and manifestations of Christianity's morally ambiguous history. Yet, the complaint is an overgeneralization. It tends to reduce the explanation of the complex ecological crisis to a single cause, to exaggerate the authority of Christianity in cultures, to minimize the fact that non-Christian cultures also have been environmental despoilers, to overlook the number of dissenting opinions in Christian history, and to underestimate the potential for ecological reform in Christianity. Some of these weaknesses, in fact, could be harmful, if they hinder our search for causes, effects, and solutions to the crisis. With this view in mind, I turn now to five corrective responses to the ecological complaint.

NO SINGLE CAUSE

The single cause theory for the emergence of our ecological crisis is pathetically simplistic. Lynn White generally recognized that fact, but he too succumbed finally to oversimplification. And most other complainants have been undeterred by fears of reductionism. They often have structured their complaint on a single, flimsy biblical passage (Gen. 1:28) dealing with "dominion," and have ignored the

fact that the Christian faith and its cultural influences have been far more complicated and ambiguous than that. Theirs is proof-texting of the worst sort. They have accused Christianity of being the parent of ecologically debilitating forms of industrialization, commercialism, and technology. However, in historical reality, many complex and interwoven causes were involved—and Christian thought was probably not the most prominent one. In fact, Christians and their churches frequently resisted these developments (though not always for morally defensible reasons).

Eco-historian Carolyn Merchant in her excellent book, *The Death of Nature,* argues against the oversimplification of causation in anti-ecological attitudes and behavior. Focusing on the emergence of modern science and technology in Europe between 1500 and 1700, she explicitly refutes much of the ecological complaint:

> In the 1960s, the Native American became the symbol in the ecological movement's search for alternatives to Western exploitative attitudes. The Indian animistic belief system and reverence for the earth as a mother were contrasted with the Judeo-Christian heritage of dominion over nature and with capitalist practices resulting in the "tragedy of the commons." . . . But . . . European culture was more complex and varied than this judgment allows. It ignores the Renaissance philosophy of the nurturing earth as well as those philosophies and social movements resistant to mainstream economic change.[14]

Merchant contends that Christian-rooted images of the earth as a living organism (vitalistic, organistic, and arcadian philosophies) served as important ethical and cultural restraints against the denudation of nature[15]—particularly against the "rape" of Earth and the pollutive effects of mining, the drainage of the fens and the destruction of their biological diversity, the deforestation resulting from the growth of shipbuilding and other industries, and urban pollution from coal-burning.[16] The major factors in the emergence of antiecological attitudes and actions were not Christian axioms, but rather population pressures, the development of expansionistic capitalism in the forms of commercialism and industrialization (particularly ship-building, glassworks, iron and copper smelting),[17] the triumph of Cartesian mechanism in science (which meant the "death" of nature, since it represented the defeat of organic assumptions, and the victory of the view that nature is "dead," inert particles moved by external forces),[18] and the triumph of Francis Bacon's notions of dominion as mastery over nature.[19] Resistance to

these developments was strong, and generally operated on Christian value assumptions other than exploitative dominion. Many saw it as wrong to meddle with God's design, and some interpreted dominion as the role of caretaker of God's creation.[20] The prevailing values prior to the scientific-technological revolution in this period were typically medieval Christian assumptions other than exploitative dominion: "The Chaucerian and typically Elizabethan view of nature was that of a kindly and caring mother provider, a manifestation of the God who imprinted a designed, planned order on the world."[21]

Merchant's thesis generally corresponds with that of Clarence Glacken in his classic ecological history, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore.* The contemporary distortion of dominion as a sanction for control over and radical modification of nature began to crystallize in this period. The scientific-technological-industrial revolution had many causes, and religion was not a dominant one.[22]

Merchant's thesis is also reminiscent of R. H. Tawney's classic, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism.* The post-Reformation economic order was not embraced with enthusiasm; it was resisted by many of the leaders from the several churches—Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Anglican, and Anabaptist.[23] Calvinistic Puritanism, and later the other churches following suit, did eventually give sanctions to some of the new commercial and industrial developments. They did not create these conditions, but they responded favorably to *some* of them (reflecting the socioeconomic makeup of their membership). Tawney states his theory clearly: "The 'capitalist spirit' is as old as history, and was not, as has sometimes been said, the offspring of Puritanism. But it found in certain aspects of *later* Puritanism a tonic which braced its energies and fortified its already vigorous temper."[24]

This assertion does not mean, however, that classical Puritanism would have blessed the ecological devastations caused by contemporary industrialization and technocratic development. Quite the contrary! The Puritans advocated the virtues of thrift, moderation, frugality, sobriety, and diligence[25]—noble values, indeed. These values, of course, led to an accumulation of capital among many of the adherents of Puritanism (to the point of distorting the social perspectives of some segments of this movement). Yet, these very values represent the antithesis of the modern norms of effluent and opulent capitalism, and these very values also represent the essence of the modern environmental movement's norms of sustainable lifestyles. Ironically, the chief ecological virtues of the modern environmental movement correspond with the virtues of classical Puritanism

(and, of course, with much earlier forms of Christian austerity), which many in the movement regard as the source of the current crisis!

Thus the ecological complaint against Christianity appears to be a serious historical oversimplification. In fact, dangerous modifications of the environment are not necessarily dependent on any philosophical or theological concept like dominion. Technological developments and industrialization, which often create ecological problems, have their own momentum. They occur often without a philosophical base,[26] or they may grasp and distort an existing concept, like dominion. I shall have a little more to say about that process of rationalization in the next section.

CHRIST AND CULTURE

The ecological complaint against Christianity is an exaggeration of religious influences on culture. It credits Christian faith and institutions with more cultural authority than they usually, if ever, exercised. This response is probably an extension of the previous one, but it still merits separate consideration.

Religion is not generally the prime mover or shaper of culture, not the decisive and independent variable that controls culture. Yet that is the myth which many of the ecological complainants assume. Religious influences vary from situation to situation; the conditions and dynamics of causation and power are extraordinarily difficult to analyze. The typical situation involves some level of reciprocity between religious and other cultural institutions, as Tawney showed with Puritanism: "Puritanism helped to mould the social order, but it was also increasingly moulded by it."[27]

Cultural influences on religion are frequently, probably even generally, greater than vice versa. Even the great ecumenical councils of the church during the Patristic age were presided over by the emperors; decisions were ratified and coerced by imperial authorities intent on using the unity of the church to preserve their sovereignty and the harmony of the empire.[28] And more than a few popes, patriarchs, and pastors have been bounced around by princes, politicians, and parishioners. The process of acculturation, however, is generally more gentle, or at least subtle. Cultural accommodation is inevitable and, to some degree, desirable; the faith is and, within limits, ought to be acculturated, in order to relate to the diverse conditions of people. That is what indigenization of Christianity in contemporary

cultures is all about. All forms of Christianity are shaped by their cultures in everything from language and rituals to values and architecture. We are partially captives of our contexts. Our theological constructions are always more or less social constructions. Our creeds always reflect the relativities of the cultures from which they emerge. The danger, of course, is that cultural aberrations may creep in (in fact, always do) and distort our expressions of the faith itself. This has been a perennial problem in Christian history, and various forms of "civil religion"—conservative and liberal—have been regular outcomes. The questions of how Christ and culture are related sociologically and ought to be related theologically are complex; various typologies have been proposed (the church-sect debate), but none more impressive than H. Richard Niebuhr's five types.[29] The Christian faith and institutions have undoubtedly influenced the mores of Western cultures, but these cultures have also—and maybe more so—influenced the expressions of the faith.

On ecological concerns, the Christian traditions probably affected the various cultural forces at work historically, but they were hardly the historical root of our ecological crisis. As I noted earlier, the variables are far too many to make such a simple assessment. Moreover, cultural forces often adopt and distort religious concepts, and use these honorific ideas as rationalizations or "justifictions" for their projects. Francis Bacon clearly used the notion of dominion in this way.[30] Examples of this phenomenon are abundant in the sociology and history of religion.

From the Puritans on, the idea of dominion was widely used as a rationale for antiwilderness attitudes on the American frontier. But the idea was dramatically embellished from its ambiguous meanings in scripture and tradition, and exaggerated far beyond its classical importance. The idea served the interests of social forces intent on economic gain and manifest destiny. Consequently, conquering the American wilderness became a religious crusade, according to Roderick Nash, in the name of national pride, ethnic identity, and progress on behalf of God. Many—not all—of the pioneers perceived themselves not only as "agents of civilization," but also as "Christ's soldiers," converting the moral wastelands of wilderness into gardens of paradise, transforming the demonic barrens into civilized beneficence.[31] Christian concepts and words were employed, but their meanings changed. Wilderness became a sinister symbol of cursed chaos; the concept lost its diverse and ambiguous meanings in classical Christian expressions.[32] Dominion experienced a similar fate: it

became isolated from the moderating and controlling influences of the whole corpus of Christian thought, and served as a license for elimination with extreme prejudice. The practices under the rubric of dominion were alien to the biblical and most traditional understandings of the concept. Instead of trusteeship or benevolence, as it had been interpreted in some earlier Christian contexts, dominion became a rationale for exploitation. Whatever else this dynamic might illustrate, it shows clearly the influence of culture on religion, particularly the distortion of religious values for social goals.

The ecological complaint raises other questions about the relationship between Christ and culture that the complainants ought to consider. If the Christian faith and institutions are the source of our ecological crisis, why did Eastern Christianity not have the same transformative effects on its cultures as Western forms allegedly had?[33] If Christian doctrines like dominion are the root cause of the rampant technological-industrial destruction of nature, why did the effects not show up much earlier in history? Why were prominent Christians often in a resistance movement against these forces? If Christian doctrines are the basic cause, how is it possible for the same doctrines to produce both the technological destruction of nature and the ascetic tradition of *contemptus mundi*?

These rhetorical questions are intended simply to suggest the complexity of the problem. Christianity is no monolith: it has had multiple strains with radically different emphases. Moreover, multiple cultural forces are at work in the process of social change, and some of them manipulate religious ideas and values for their interests. The ecological complainants should remember that there are Christian-influenced cultures and culture-influenced Christian churches, but there is no such thing as a Christian culture. The norms of the faith and the practices of the culture are always at least in tension. Remembering this reality will help to prevent simplistic causal theories about Christian values being decisive influences on cultures.

ECOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

The ecological complaint against Christianity overlooks the complex, ambiguous, and diversified character of Christian history. The complainants tend to assume a monolith and, therefore, perceive only the majority or dominant opinions. They miss the varied voices—albeit minorities—for ecological sensitivity in Christian history. These voices

are not always prominent, though sometimes they are. And they are frequently ambivalent—even contradictory—mixing anthropocentric and biocentric values inconsistently. But the important point is that these voices are present and persistent. The evidence is sufficient to justify the claim that the Christian faith has coexisted comfortably and coherently with ecological values.

I will cite here a few vignettes of ecological sensitivity in historical Christian thought and practice. Not even pretending to be an historian, I can do little more than provide a spattering of data, but they are sufficient, I think, to confirm my point. I hope, moreover, that church historians will follow the example of Professor George H. Williams, historian emeritus of Harvard Divinity School (and a "nature lover"!), and give more attention to this field. There probably is no "hidden tradition" of ecological sensitivity in Christian history,[34] but there is much in the known traditions that has been bypassed and could be highlighted as a boon to a generation yearning for ecologically sensitive precedents.

Paul Santmire in *The Travail of Nature* argues that one strain of Christian thought is characterized by an "ecological motif," which emphasizes human rootedness in nature and celebrates God's presence in the biophysical world.[35] This strain, he claims, includes Irenaeus, Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. In Luther and Calvin, for instance, one must look to the circumference rather than to the center of their thought for vital signs of the "ecological motif." Even there, it is sometimes ambiguous, but the important consideration is that the motif is present[36]—and present to a sufficient degree to contend that the Reformers never sanctioned interpretations of dominion as license for abuse. Santmire shows that Christian theology, while neither ecologically bankrupt nor affluent, offers the promise of a strong base for ecological responsibility. Santmire's selection, however, is necessarily limited. Other theologians with ecological sensitivities might have been included: John Scotus Erigena (*Perisphyseon*), John Wesley, H. Richard Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and many of the early Greek theologians.[37]

In fact, Eastern Orthodoxy provides significant evidence against the ecological complaint. In their theology and piety, the Orthodox churches have prominently and proudly retained the expectation of the redemption of all creation and the sanctification of all matter through the incarnation.[38] These and other relevant doctrines have by no means been embodied consistently or regularly in the practices of the Eastern churches; they too are not immune to the ecological

complaint; they too are guilty of sins of omission and commission. Nonetheless, through the ideals of living in humility in recognition of humanity's place *in* nature, and seeking to minimize the alienation between humanity and the rest of nature in anticipation of the final transfiguration, Eastern Orthodoxy has a great deal to teach the Western churches about the ecological implications of the Christian faith. I shall have occasion to cite several examples of these contributions in subsequent pages.

Christian piety also has retained important signs of ecological sensitivity. Joseph Sittler claims that the church "has intuited and sung and prayed beyond her doctrines." An affirmation of creation has "squeaked into her life via liturgy, paratheological documents, and hymnody"[39]—as well as psalms (like Ps. 104), poetry, legends, and art.[40] The ecologically conscious hymns include some commonly used classics: the Benedicite (the apocryphal Song of the Three Children, used historically in the Office of Lauds in the ancient liturgical churches of East and West, read daily by Francis of Assisi from his breviary, and strongly reminiscent of his Canticle of Brother Sun), *Cordus Natus Ex Parentis* ("Let Creation Praise Its Lord, Evermore and Evermore"), "All Things Bright and Beautiful," "For the Beauty of the Earth," "This Is My Father's World," "All Creatures of Our God and King" (translation of Francis's Canticle of Brother Sun), and "I Sing the Almighty Power of God" (Isaac Watts).

But it was in some of the legendary exploits of the saints that historical Christian ecological sensitivity becomes most intriguing. The stories of saints' relationships with nonhuman creatures are an important indicator of ecological consciousness. The stories are significant not only in themselves, but also because they are remembered and celebrated as illustrative models of behavior for Christians to emulate.

1. Desert Fathers

The influential stories of the Desert Fathers contain a number of scattered accounts of human encounters with the "denizens of the desert." These monks of the third and fourth centuries withdrew into the deserts of Egypt and Syria to escape social decadence and to duplicate the harmonious conditions of a prelapsarian Paradise, to avoid distractions and to ascend the ladder of perfection, to face demons in spiritual combat, and to find God in soul-saving contemplation and severe asceticism. These hard-working, hard-

praying, and hard-fasting hermits—called "athletes of God"—were noted for their humility, charity, and simplicity.

Their life-styles are theologically and morally dubious to many of us. And their legends are not always the stuff that will delight naturalists. Occasionally, some animals are seen as demonically possessed and, therefore, destroyed. Often the stories are about divine protection from animals or saintly control over animals—thus suggestive of the powers of benevolent dominion in Eden. Some stories will legitimately offend herpetologists. Though a couple of mighty serpents patrolled the premises of one holy man as his guardians,[41] that type of relationship is rare. Some of the other fathers frequently killed poisonous snakes and other reptiles, sometimes in self-defense but not always. Abba (a title connoting a distinguished elder in piety) Appellen, for instance, crossed a river on the back of a crocodile, which came at his call. When he was across, Appellen killed the crocodile, asserting: "Death is better for thee than punishment for the souls which thou hast already slain, and wouldst slay."[42] In judging the Desert Fathers, however, it is important to allow for extenuating circumstances: they lived in a genuinely dangerous environment, without the benefit of hiking boots, secure tents, nearby hospitals, well-managed trails, and four-lane highways. It is not easy to love wilderness that is truly wild.

Yet, a few of the stories reveal authentic friendship between humans and other animals. Mar Paul, the so-called Prince of the Monks, was regularly visited in his cave by a hyena. For sixty years, a raven daily brought him a half-loaf of bread, but when Paul was visited by St. Anthony, the raven brought a full loaf. When Paul died during the visit from Anthony, two lions came running, wagging their tails in friendship at Anthony, and mourning the death of their friend. They dug a grave for Paul, kissed Anthony's hands and feet, and purred for a blessing.[43] Macarius the Alexandrian, and a vegetarian (as most were), was "a lover beyond all other men of the desert, and had explored its ultimate and inaccessible wastes."[44] Once desperate with thirst, he suckled milk from a congenial buffalo who followed him. On another occasion, Macarius healed the blind whelp of a hyena, who later brought him a sheepskin cloak in gratitude.[45] He even sentenced himself to six months of sitting naked in a mosquito-infested area for vindictively crushing a biting mosquito.[46]

My favorite Desert Father, however, was Abba Theon, healer of poor folks, onetime scholar, vegetarian, and indisputable "soul friend" of field naturalists:

> His food consisted of garden herbs, and they said that he used to go forth from his cell by night and mingle with the wild animals of the desert, and he gave them to drink of the water which he found. The footmarks which appeared by the side of his abode were those of buffaloes, and goats, and gazelle, in the sight of which he took great pleasure.[47]

Despite a theology of world renunciation, not all of these anchorites could resist the temptation of consorting with the local inhabitants and loving it. And their deeds were remembered and celebrated and sometimes emulated.

2. *Celtic Saints*

The nature-loving tendencies of some of the Desert Fathers were influential throughout the monastic communities of Christendom. Some of the monks of sixth- and seventh-century France, for example, were famous for courageously protecting wild animals like boar, deer, and hares from royal hunters and providing sanctuaries on their lands.[48] But nowhere is the desert influence more strongly evident than among the early medieval Celtic saints. Even some of the stories of their exploits are probably borrowed from the hermits (though none about snakes; St. Patrick presumably solved that problem for his successors!). The legends of these Irish monks are filled with embellished accounts—even fantastic tales—of mutual affection and service between saints and animals. Some of these tales are manifestations of classical dominion, designed by hagiographers to show the saints' capacities to restore some of the innocence of Eden. However, compassion and care are the dominant features of these stories, as the following sampling illustrates.

Wild deer voluntarily substituted for oxen to pull a wagon of timber for Finian of Clonard, and another deer regularly carried the books of a monk in his antlers.[49] When St. Molaisse of Devenish wanted to write a book, a bird dropped a feather to make a pen. A wild boar used his tusks to build a cell for St. Ciaren of Saigir.[50] A fox carried the Psalter back and forth across the fields to two monks who could not leave their posts.[51] After a frigid night at sea, two otters warmed the feet of St. Cuthbert with their breath and dried him with their fur.[52] Every third day for thirty years, another otter brought to one monk a fish for dinner and twigs for a fire.[53] Birds and squirrels came to the call of St. Columban and sat quietly under his hand.[54] A mouse nibbled at the ear of St. Colman of Kilmacdaugh to wake him for his prayers, and a mosquito once voluntarily served as a bookmark when the saint was

called away from his reading.[55] (Questions about how or to what effect are best suspended in the context of hagiography.)

The first monks of St. Ciaren the Elder of Osriage were a group of animals, including a fox, badger, wolf, and deer—all living together peacefully and all called "Brother." Apparently, however, there were occasional lapses of discipline, since the fox once stole and ate the Abbot's sandals. The sorrowful Brother Fox, however, did penance for his sin.[56] Through prayer, Kentigan restored a robin to life after it had been torn apart by some malicious boys,[57] and St. Moling did the same for a wren killed by a cat—and then commanded the wren to follow the saint's merciful example by disgorging a fly it had swallowed earlier.[58]

The Irish saints were often wandering penitents—the traveling yarns reaching their peak in the sixth century *Voyage of St. Brendan the Navigator.* Consequently, their influence spread with their travels throughout Europe. In the monastic communities of Europe, their legends were remembered, celebrated, and imitated—including the tales of their affectionate relationship with nonhuman creatures. Their sacramental sense of the natural world as the place of divine presence and revelation ran deep; their appreciation of that world as the creation of God was intense. When they established monastic communities, their site selections were generally places of "great natural beauty," symbols of Paradise.[59]

3. St. Francis

Francis of Assisi is frequently treated in the ecological complaint as a nearly isolated example of ecological responsibility in a sea of Christian exploitation of nature. That claim is indefensible. Though St. Francis probably should be regarded as the epitome of Christian love in an ecological context, since his life was a radical demonstration that humanity should concern itself with the welfare of all creatures,[60] he neither emerged nor departed in a vacuum. Though sometimes innovative, his expressions and actions were "some of the grandest and most explicit manifestations and elaborations of common presuppositions" of his time.[61] He was the foremost of a cloud of witnesses, often obscure and forgotten, who preceded and followed him. Judging from some similarities in the legends, the hagiographers of Francis probably borrowed from the hagiographies of the Celtic saints,[62] who, in turn, borrowed from the hagiographies of the Desert Fathers. A little hagiographic competition was going on here: my saint's better than your saint! Whatever the process, Francis may have been the best, but

he was not the first Christian with an implicit or explicit biocentric ethic. And he would not be the last.

The stories about St. Francis and the nonhuman creation abound and are well known. Even those who rarely read have at least seen the bird baths. The stories were obviously enhanced to mythical proportions by his early admirers. A major intent of some of the hagiographers, as was the case with the Desert Fathers and the Celtic saints, was to demonstrate the saintly compassion and miraculous power of their hero to elicit affection and secure subservience from lesser creatures, as a sign of his holy innocence and, therefore, of his abilities to restore some of the original harmony of Eden.[63] The "obedient animal motif "[64] is really an expression of anthropocentric dominion. Yet, in Francis, as in some of the earlier saints, this motif shows clear signs of the mutual affection and service that Christian love ultimately is. The prominence, character, and general consistency of the animal stories leave little, if any, room for doubt that underneath the hagiographic puffery is a core of authentic biocentrism. Francis is "an embodiment of Christianity's ecological promise";[65] "the purest figure (gestalt) of Western history, of the dreams, the utopias, and of the meaning of living panfraternally that we are all searching for today."[66]

He genuinely loved the Creator, the creation, and its creatures, and he expressed that love with extravagant friendship, compassion, tenderness, kindness, and even sacrifice. He treated all things courteously in the tradition of chivalry. He befriended and blessed pheasants, cicadas, lambs, mice, rabbits, waterfowl, fish, turtle doves (for whom he once made a nest[67]), bees, worms that he gently lifted from his path, and certainly "sister larks" (the killing of which he wanted the Emperor to outlaw).[68] Addressing the notorious, human-devouring Wolf of Gubbio as "Brother," Francis reprimanded and converted him into a dispositional sheep in canine clothing, who gave Francis his paw in repentance and vowed never thereafter to hurt human or beast.[69] Francis even preached to his "little sisters" the birds, who listened reverently, and told them, "Your Creator loveth you so much, since he hath dealt so bounteously with you."[70] With his sacramental sense, his nature mysticism,[71] Francis "not only loved but reverenced God in all his creatures";[72] he saw in a chirping cicada the handiwork of the Creator.[73] But it is clear that Francis also passionately loved them all for themselves, calling them brothers and sisters in consciousness of kinship. And they often returned the affection. A

falcon, for instance, regularly awakened him at night for prayer. Other creatures enjoyed cuddling with him and sometimes brought him gifts.

Francis's integrated affinities, however, did not stop with the animal realm; they were inclusive, cosmocentric. The sun, moon, water, fire, plants, and rocks were greeted as siblings, because he shared with them a common Source.[74] When he walked over stones, one hagiographer said, he did so reverently for the love of the one who is called the Rock. He told the wood-cutting friar not to cut down the whole tree but only to remove the branches, for the love of him who saved us on the cross. The gardening friar was instructed not to till the whole plot but to leave part for the wild flowers, in love of the one who is the lily of the valley and the flower of the field.[75] Despite these allegorical interpretations, the general tenor of his life-style, capped by The Canticle of Brother Sun, suggests that his ethic was loving respect for all his cosmic comrades in creation.

Francis comes to us in many respects as a stranger. He is an anachronism from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. His behavior was often bizarre. His life-style was austere, even pathological by some contemporary standards. Most of these dimensions of his life are conveniently forgotten or passed over quickly—and often legitimately so. Yet, Francis is remembered and celebrated mainly for the breadth and depth of his love, particularly for the poor, the sick (for example, lepers), and other life forms (animal and plant). His love was integrated, whole. Concerning his love for nonhuman creatures, he has been remembered and celebrated not for poignant idiosyncracies that are optional supplements to the Christian faith or even hedgings on heresy, but rather for representing the model of what a fully blooming Christian love might be. His affinities for nature are understood not as an alien addition to the gospel, but rather as an appropriate and even essential extension of it. Only such a thesis can adequately explain the power that his story has exercised over every subsequent generation of Christians,[76] and the fact that he has been memorialized by Christians of all subspecies as the only ecumenical—and ecological—saint, as a beacon by which to be guided. What a people remember and celebrate is not trivial; it is a sign of their norms, their Christian axioms, and a goading judgment on their behavior.

4. Significant Others

Francis was by no means the last ecologically sensitive Christian. The breadth and depth of his affection for nature were certainly rare, maybe even unique, but that does not mean that his example was not

followed in various degrees by countless of his ilk in succeeding generations. Most are ordinary, unsung, and now unknown women and men. Some are remembered in the histories. Only a few can be mentioned here. Thus, a haphazard litany follows.

The tradition of creation-centered spirituality, according to Matthew Fox, included such noteworthies as Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179, actually a predecessor of Francis), Mechtild of Magdeburg (1210–1280), Meister Eckhart (1260–1329), and Julian of Norwich (1342–1415), who rejoiced in the blessings of the earth and its inhabitants.[77] The medieval bestiaries, produced by monastics, also deserve mention. The bestiary, while intended to be biologically serious (and was in its time), often contains fantastic descriptions of animals and comparable moralizations and allegories. Yet, there is truth in the judgment, particularly when due allowance is made for the times, that the bestiary is a "compassionate book" that displays "a reverence for the wonders of life, and praises the creator of them."[78] Members of the Evangelical movement in England in the latter part of the eighteenth century, especially Quakers and Methodists, were in the forefront of the struggle against cruelty to animals—just as their Puritan predecessors had been in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in combatting cock-fighting and bear-baiting.[79] One of their leaders was William Wilberforce, best known as a major voice in the antislavery cause.[80] Anglicans also joined in. In 1776, the Reverend Doctor Humphrey Primatt published *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals,* which argued from scripture that love is required in relations with other animals and cruelty is a heresy.[81] By the early part of the nineteenth century in England (and in the eastern cities of the United States), clerical denunciations of the maltreatment of animals had become commonplace.[82] That routinization, however, did not always come without cost: when one Anglican vicar in 1772 preached against the abuse of animals, his appalled parishioners concluded that he had either gone mad or turned Methodist![83]

We dare not forget, moreover, the most famous of a long line of country parson-naturalists, the Reverend Gilbert White of Selborne, England. His reverential nature studies in his parish were a major contribution to field studies in ecology, and his book, *The Natural History of Selborne* (1789), was by this century the fourth most published book in the English language, having appeared in well over a hundred editions![84] Two other rural pastors, Francis Orpen Morris and H. F. Barnes, were instrumental in protecting wild birds in England in the

nineteenth century.[85] During this same period on the other side of the Atlantic, there was "Johnny Appleseed" or John Chapman, whom we do well to remember. This Swedenborgian missionary did more than operate apple nurseries: "In his religiously inspired mercies to wild creatures, he was one with Francis of Assisi and the desert Fathers."[86] Finally, we should not ignore the ecologically minded poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins ("God's Grandeur," "Inversnaid," "Binsey Poplars"), William Blake ("Auguries of Innocence"), and the obscure Thomas Traherne. The litany continues into the present,[87] with many practitioners of an allegedly antiecological faith being actively involved in ecological causes.

The list could be supplemented at length. That is why we need more historical studies of this substream of Christian ecological consciousness, which meanders through Christian-influenced cultures. The voices from the past are often ambivalent and sometimes contradictory, but they exist. They should be assessed in the context of their times, not anachronistically by late-twentieth century, avant garde ecological standards. They provide significant evidence against the charge that Christianity has been historically or is inherently an antiecological faith.

INTERRELIGIOUS MISCOMPARISONS

The alleged ecological superiority of other religions and cultures over Christianity may be partly a manifestation of Western parochialism and historical myopia. The claim of the ecological complaint that Christianity should be abandoned in favor of another religion or fully infiltrated by the ecological values of another religion demands a response, particularly since so many contemporary Christian environmentalists seem sympathetic to infiltration. The response, however, must be a cautious one, in order to avoid the danger of succumbing to comparative religious or cross-cultural polemics ("My faith is better than your faith"). No one benefits from those diatribes. Nonetheless, some delicate apologetics are in order as a witness for the defense.

Ecological crises are not peculiar to Christian-influenced cultures. Non-Christian cultures have also caused severe or irreparable harm to their ecosystems. Ethicist Thomas Derr describes the situation with bluntness:

> Ecological mismanagement is not the property of areas of Christian influence, nor exclusively of modern technology. Over-grazing, deforestation [as well, I must add, as over-population, desertification, extinctions, erosion, etc.] and similar errors, of sufficient magnitude to destroy civilizations [and ecosystems], have been committed by Egyptians, Assyrians, Romans, North Africans, Persians, Indians, Aztecs, and Buddhists. Centuries before the Christian era Plato commented, in his *Critias,* on the deforestation of Attica. Since primitive times man has been altering his environment dramatically, in ways that upset ecological balances. Early hunters used fire to drive out their game. Agricultural people everywhere clear fields and dam streams and wipe out stock predators and kill plants that get in the way of their chosen crops. In the modern industrial era western technology is widely copied elsewhere in the world, including areas where Christianity has had little effect.[88]

Elsewhere Derr adds: "We are simply being gullible when we take at face value the advertisement for the ecological harmony of non-Western cultures."[89]

Derr's viewpoint is not unique. Others have made similar arguments and only slightly less bluntly.[90] I essentially agree. The situation forces the ecological complainants to ask themselves: If the ecological crisis is a consequence of Christian axioms, why have so many non-Christian-influenced cultures experienced—and are experiencing—the same crisis? If Christianity is so intimately linked with Western technological arrogance and industrialization, why have many non-Christian-influenced cultures been eager to adopt these same processes?[91] These rhetorical questions simply point us to a deeper source of our ecological crisis.

The near-universality of ecological problems suggests that the roots of the crisis are not in theological affirmations themselves, but rather in human character. Ecologist Peter Farb makes this point clearly:

> It appears to be a characteristic of the human [evolutionary] line—perhaps the one that accounts for its domination of the earth—that from the very beginning *Homo* [*sapiens*] has exploited the environment up to his technological limits to do so. But until recently the harm this exploitation could cause was limited, for ancient man's populations were low and his technology primitive.[92]

Farb sees the problem as a genetic defect; classical Christianity might describe it as a volitional defect, a moral misuse of human freedom and creativity, or sin. The latter interpretation implies that humans are not doomed by determinism. Either way, however, the problem is far deeper than cultural conditioning or religious training, though these factors certainly have their effects.

If Farb and others are right, moreover, about the ecological effects of population growth and technological sophistication, it is a fallacy of misplaced comparison to compare indigenous communities with complex, pluralistic, anonymous, technologically "advanced" societies. It may be relatively easy for indigenous communities—often with small populations controlled in size by the medically unhampered dynamics of their ecosystems—to live in equilibrium with their environments. It is incomparably more difficult for crowded, technological societies to do so. Comparing one with the other is unfair. Though we have much to learn from the ecological knowledge and moral attitudes of indigenous communities, advocating their practices for technological societies seems largely irrelevant. If these communities grow in population and develop further technical skills, they too are likely to be tempted to follow the path to ecological disaster, for the problem appears to be dormant in the human condition.

Similarly, it is unfair to compare the ideals of one religion or culture with the realities of another. That seems obvious; comparing theology with sociology is absurd. Yet, such fallacious comparisons are commonplace. Other religions are nearly deified for their often romanticized ecological ideals, and Christianity is virtually demonized for its empirical defects. But when like is compared to like, both Christianity and some other religions can display some noble norms and models, and both have substantial grounds for repentance for practical deficiencies. Ambiguities, of course, will emerge in a process of fair comparisons. Traditional Christian anthropocentrism, for instance, has had some dire ecological effects, but it also gradually and painfully helped to produce, particularly in Puritan-influenced cultures, some very positive social consequences: the dignity of the individual, human rights, and democratic political structures (all linked with the idea of the "image of God" in Gen. 1:26-28!). That too should be noted in any fair comparisons.

Nothing said here implies that Christianity cannot benefit ecologically from dialogue with practitioners of other religions—Buddhists, Hindus, Native Americans, Jains, and others. The dismissal of dialogue is arrogant and self-diminishing. Dialogue can be enriching;[93] but it must be, at least potentially, *mutually* enriching. Interreligious dialogue should not be asymmetrical, between providers and recipients. Christians ought not to enter such conversations with bowed heads and hats in hand, waiting masochistically to be verbally whipped for their sins and begging for handouts of ecological wisdom from their benefactors. Instead, Christians should enter into dialogue

as both givers and receivers and expect their partners to do the same. Dialogue is between equals, or else it is a monologue or tutorial. Both partners can benefit from such equality, and both need to benefit. All have sinned and fallen short of the nobility of morality, let alone the glory of God. Historically, for instance, there seems to be an "intractable ambiguity" about the ecological norms and practices of Native American cultures and religions,[94] but the same can be said about Christianity and other religions. In this context, anything less than symmetrical dialogue may bear the marks of condescension—treating other religious groups as inferior by the ironic deception of romanticizing their histories and norms, and pronouncing their superiority in some isolated respect.[95] Through symmetrical dialogue, however, both parties can be both benefactors and beneficiaries, making both our futures better than our pasts.

POTENTIAL FOR REFORMATION

Even if everything in the ecological complaint were true, even if Christianity stood totally indicted for its ecological crimes of the past, these hypothetical facts would not necessarily prevent Christianity from developing strong ecological ethics and actions for the future. Assuming enduring fidelity to the intentions of faith in the central affirmations found in the apostolic witnesses in scripture, Christianity is not otherwise bound to its past—to the various expressions of faith and other cultural accretions in its history. The past is provisional and parochial. The corruptions of the past need corrections for the future.

Historically, the Christian faith has shown a remarkable capacity for flexibility, for stretching—for extensions of the applications of its doctrines, for reinterpretations based on new insights into scripture and tradition, for incorporations of compatible (and often incompatible) elements from the cultures in which the churches have been embedded and also from other religious traditions. The Patristic theologians, for example, provide a prominent precedent. They appropriated the metaphysics and often the mythologies of their milieus as means of expressing their understandings of the faith. Their particular borrowings are not binding, but their process is certainly prudent. In fact, as critical approaches to the Bible demonstrate, the Bible itself is the most prominent precedent for the various forms of flexibility.

In short, the Christian church has a history of and a capacity for

self-reformation. "Always to Be Reformed" (*Semper Reformanda*) was a Protestant motto in the post-Reformation period. Similar, but less flamboyant and more restricted, understandings have been present in other Christian traditions. In the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the church has found provisions for continuing revelation. New light, new truth is always breaking forth from the Spirit. These new revelations can come through both theological and ecological studies, intra-Christian or interreligious dialogue, and all other means of reasoning on human experience. The Spirit cannot be closeted. This capacity for change means that the church can readily incorporate new elements and reinterpret its main themes to develop a solid, ultimate grounding for an ecological ethic. That development, in fact, would be the very best refutation of the ecological complaint against Christianity.

In a sense, the church does need "new" theological and ethical bases for sustaining ecological integrity. This need, however, does not entail abandoning or replacing Christianity's main themes. Rather, it requires extensions and reinterpretations of these main themes in ways that preserve their historic identity and that are also consistent with ecological data. The next two chapters are an effort to show the significant ecological potential in some central Christian convictions.

CHAPTER FOUR

FIRM FOUNDATIONS:

DOCTRINES OF CREATION, COVENANT, DIVINE IMAGE, INCARNATION, AND SPIRITUAL PRESENCE

The Christian faith, despite the historical ambiguities in its ecological credentials, has the impressive potential to become an indestructibly firm foundation for ecological integrity. The faith contains all things necessary, all the values and virtues, for ecological integrity. Indeed, nothing short of that integrity is compatible, in my view, with authentic representations of the Christian faith. What, then, are the ecological implications of some central affirmations of Christianity? In what directions do these convictions point for ecological ethics and action? These are the questions discussed in the next two chapters.

Unlike philosophical ethics, which seeks to be an autonomous discipline—developing its values and principles on "reason alone," independent, practically and logically, of "religion"[1]—Christian theology and ethics do not have the luxury of debating about autonomy. These disciplines cannot function independently; they are interdependent, reciprocally critical and influential. Christian ethics, for instance, contributes to theology by making ethical evaluations of theological formulations. That is what classical liberalism did in envisioning "a morally credible deity"[2]—descriptions of God that corresponded with moral sensitivities about love and justice and the richest Christian experiences of God in scripture and tradition. Theology, in turn, critiques ethics on its consistency with theological affirmations. Above all, however, theology provides Christian ethics with its groundings, the interpretations of God in relation to the creation on which ethics structures its basic values and norms.

Thus the two are not only interactive; they should also be coherent, internally consistent, adequately comprehensive, and integrative of experiential data.

On these assumptions, the next two chapters are efforts to show the significant promise of ecologically and ethically "reformed" theological affirmations as a foundation for Christian ecological ethics and actions. Ecological responsibility does not require the abandonment or replacement of Christianity's main theological themes. "New" or "radical" or "imported" theologies are not necessary. What is required, however, are reinterpretations, extensions, and revisions, as well as cast-offs of cultural corruptions, in ways that preserve the historic identity of the relevant Christian doctrines and yet integrate ethical insights and ecological data. In fact, in most cases, the necessary "reforms" have long been part of some segments of the Christian tradition. The "reforms," then, are often rediscoveries of ancient wisdom embedded in parts of scripture and tradition. Other proposed reforms are simply reasonable extensions of Christian doctrines to their horizons—a process that compels corrections, additions, and excisions. The process is relatively conservative, though the product may appear radical to some (and perhaps reactionary to others). The revisions are more akin to pruning and trimming than to a "root and branch" transformation. The important point, however, is that Christian theology can remain loyal to the intentions of faith in the historic affirmations of the church while developing a genuinely ecological theology. I doubt, in fact, that the former is possible without the latter.

This chapter focuses on the ecological implications of five historic Christian affirmations concerning *creation, covenant, the divine image and dominion, incarnation,* and *spiritual presence.* The next chapter gives attention to *sin, divine judgment, cosmic redemption,* and *the church.* These are only fragments, even though major ones, of what I think needs to be incorporated into a truly systematic ecological theology. A "creation theology" is insufficient as an ecological grounding; other doctrinal foundations need to be included. I, of course, do not pretend that the list of topics or the discussion of each topic is exhaustive. Others might make a different selection and would certainly offer different stresses and interpretations. That is the nature of classical Christian diversity. My purpose is adequately served if I can show that a reasonably and modestly reformed Christian theology can provide in its central affirmations—and not simply in peripheral elements—an ultimate, sustaining foundation for ecological integrity.

CREATION: GOD'S COSMIC AND RELATIONAL VALUES

The first statement of the classical creeds—the Apostles' and Nicene symbols—is a confession of faith in God as the Maker of heaven and earth. It is the foundation of all that follows. It is an affirmation of divine sovereignty, universal providence, creaturely dependence, and—implicitly and recessively—ecological responsibility.

God is the Pantocrator, the sole governor and final benefactor, the sovereign source of all being and becoming, the ultimate provider and universal proprietor, the originator and systemic organizer. All elements and inhabitants of this planet and solar system, and every planet and solar system, from the sun and moon to lakes and mountains, from protozoa to humans, are finite creatures—creations of God and finally dependent on God's providential preservation and parental care. In wisdom, God creates all things, provides food and shelter for all life forms, gives the breath of life and takes it away (Ps. 104). God alone is the owner: "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world and all those who live in it" (Ps. 24:1)—a claim that ancient Israel interpreted as imposing ethical restrictions on the use of the land by its temporary occupants, the human "aliens and tenants" (Lev. 25:23).

The logic of the doctrine of creation does not permit a nature-grace dichotomy. That fact, however, has not deterred Christian churches from restricting in practice the scope of grace to matters of personal salvation, and the means of grace to ecclesiastical functions—Word and sacraments—performed through ecclesiastical functionaries.[3] These typical restrictions distort the doctrine of creation, as Joseph Sittler argued brilliantly. Grace is not only the forgiveness of sins but the "givenness" of life,[4] both redemption and creation—"a double gratuity."[5] The whole of nature—the biophysical universe—is not the antithesis of grace, but rather an expression of grace, that is, God's free and faithful loving kindness that characterizes God's nature and acts. God *is* love. The creative process, therefore, is an act of love, and its creatures are products of love and recipients of ongoing love (cf. Ps. 136:1-9). This fundamental affirmation has critical implications for a Christian ecological ethic, as I will argue in chapter 6. Here, however, it is sufficient to note that the church's explication of grace or love must be comprehensive, characterized by a "Trinitarian amplitude" that covers the whole and all the parts of creation as the "field of grace."[6] The elimination of a nature-grace dichotomy, and its replacement with an understanding of nature as a manifestation and beneficiary of grace, endows all of nature with an intrinsic moral significance.[7]

From this perspective of radical monotheism in the doctrine of creation, there are no lesser divinities—not the sun and moon (against the worship of which Genesis 1:14-18 was a reaction), not golden calves and other "graven images," not sacred groves or ancient trees, not mighty mountains or volcanoes, not fearsome beasts or demons, not caesars or pharaohs or heroes, and not even Gaia or Mother Earth. In this view, polytheism, animism, astrology, totemism, and other forms of nature worship are not only idolatry, but also, as the prophets regularly suggested, vanity and stupidity (cf. Isa. 40:12-28; 44:9-20; 46:1-11; Acts 14:15). The Creator alone is worthy of worship. In fact, in manifestations of the pathetic fallacy, the Old Testament occasionally calls all creatures, biotic and abiotic, to praise their Maker (Pss. 148, 96, 98). Nevertheless, though only the Creator is worthy of worship, all God's creatures are worthy of moral consideration, as a sign of the worthiness imparted by God and, in fact, as an expression of the worship of God. The monotheistic doctrine of creation does not desacralize nature: "Nature is still sacred by virtue of having been created by God, declared to be good, and placed under ultimate divine sovereignty."[8]

The classical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) should be understood in the context of this radical monotheism. It was derived especially from New Testament sources (Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3) and was intended to enhance the affirmation of God alone as the source of all being. Nothing in creation is independent of nor identifiable with God. The doctrine rejects, on the one hand, metaphysical dualism, which usually posits dialectical forces of Good and Evil (the latter often responsible for creation) or God the Orderer and the primordial chaos. On the other hand, it rejects pantheism, which identifies Creator and creation.[9] Though not implied by the first Genesis story of creation and probably irrelevant to the text,[10] creation *ex nihilo* probably corresponds with the intention of the priestly author of Genesis 1.[11] The doctrine appears vacuous from the perspective of philosophical speculation. It is hardly an explanation of origins, but that is precisely its point and value. The doctrine is not designed to be an explanation; rather, it is designed to prevent explanations that compromise the affirmation of divine sovereignty. Creation *ex nihilo* is a denial of ultimate dualism and pantheism, and an affirmation of divine sovereignty and mystery.[12] It represents humility in the face of ultimate mysteries that transcend human possibilities of understanding.

The same sense of mystery is present in the first and primary story of creation in the Old Testament (Gen. 1:1–2:4).[13] The story is not, nor was it intended to be, an account in natural history, natural science, or

metaphysics. It is not compatible with scientific data, nor was it intended to be, nor should it be interpreted to be. In fact, the second story of creation in Genesis 2, with its significantly different ordering of the creative process, illustrates that the biblical compilers were not significantly interested in scientific accuracy or intratextual consistency. The priestly writer (P) of Genesis 1, like his counterpart (J) in Genesis 2, was transmitting and transforming a varied tradition, which included ancient myths of origins.[14] The text represents not an empirical inquiry but rather an existential one. It is not a speculative cosmogony but rather a confession of faith.[15] Genesis 1 is not interested in creation methodologies and processes: "The Bible discusses not *how* the world was made but rather *who* made it."[16] The text is a "mythopoetic" proclamation of God's sovereign Reign and relationships with the whole creation; it expresses a different order of truth than scientific inquiry.[17] It is a theological affirmation that "permits every scientific view that is genuinely scientific and not a theological claim in disguise."[18] Consequently, Genesis 1 opposes two contrary forms of fundamentalism: pseudo-scientific positivism or reductionism and biblical literalism.[19] The writer displays humility in the face of ultimate mystery about origins by concentrating on the proclamation of Israel's faith in the Originator.

Since God is the source of all in the Christian doctrine of creation, all creatures share in a common relationship. This kinship of all creatures is symbolized in the second Genesis story of creation by the formation of both humans and other animals from the same element, the earth (2:17, 19). It is symbolized in the first creation account by the fact that humans and other land animals are created on the same day, "a subtle literary indication of affinity."[20] This affirmation of relationality is, moreover, enhanced by the theory of evolution, which describes humans as related to every other form of life through our common beginnings in one or more living cells and through our subsequent adaptive interactions. We evolved relationally; we exist symbiotically. Human existence depends on coexistence with the rest of creation. Equally, the doctrine of creation implies that nature is not alien to humans; we are interrelated parts and products of a world that is continually being made and nurtured by God.

On the assumption that one ought to value God's relational design, this theocentric—and biological—kinship has often been interpreted in Christian history as having ethical implications. Thus, St. Chrysostom argued: "Surely, we ought to show them [nonhuman animals] great kindness and gentleness for many reasons, but above all,

because they are of the same origin as ourselves."[21] Similarly, St. Francis called other creatures—from the sun to stones, from worms to wolves—brother and sister, "because he knew they had the same source as himself."[22] In this vein, one of the fundamental tasks of Christian ecological ethics is to determine the moral responsibilities entailed by the reality of theocentric and ecological kinship.

The creation is also "good"—indeed, as a whole, "very good." This has been an enduring affirmation of the Christian church in following the lead of Genesis 1—though oftentimes, as we have seen, it has been a mere formality as Christians have shown disdain or indifference for nature, matter, and "the world." Nevertheless, the assertion itself is strange and troubling to anyone who is sensitive to the agonies of natural evil. How can the creation be "very good" in the light of the suffering and death that are built into the system? Indeed, how can the Creator be "very good" in the light of the ambiguous character of creation? Despite the awe that the biosphere inspires and the good that it sustains, the other side of ambiguous reality is that evil is an inherent part of the system, not an alien force. Empirically speaking, suffering and death came into the world not through sin but rather through natural processes. Death occurred universally long before the evolution of the first human with the post-instinctual, moral capacities to exercise free judgment, the precondition of a sinful condition. Is this claim of goodness then a sign of moral insensitivity or romanticism? Partly both, I fear. Yet, the claim of the goodness of creation is not so easily abandoned. It expresses a truth that is not only essential for ontological meaning and theological integrity, but also for ecological ethics.

Though exegetes differ, the meaning of the goodness of creation in Genesis 1 appears to be both moral and aesthetic. A crafter has completed a project, according to Claus Westermann, and the results are successful. The achievement is beautiful and functional. It works according to the design, and it can fulfill God's purposes in creating the system.[23] The work of creation is a product of the divine wisdom—intelligible, coherent, and purposeful, though mysterious to all creatures. God is pleased, satisfied, even delighted with the results of the creative process (Ps. 104:31), because they correspond with divine intentions and expectations. Thus the ecosphere (indeed, the universe) is valued by the Source of value in all its moral ambiguity—including the predation and prodigality that are inherent parts of the dynamics of evolution and ecology, including the inseparable intertwinings of beauty and ugliness, including the combination of destruction and construction in floods and quakes, including the ordered chaos in the

structure of ecosystems, and including the "purposive randomness" with elements of creative chance structured into generally predictable processes.[24] But God has a mysterious purpose, and God values the creation in its ambiguous state because it contributes to that purpose.

Divine valuations, however, in scripture and in the logic of the doctrine of creation are not solely or even primarily anthropocentric. The universe was not created mainly for "man," contrary to the humorously arrogant pronouncements in most periods of Christian history. The creation and its creatures are declared to be "good," according to Genesis 1, *before* the emergence of *Homo sapiens. All* animals are blessed with fertility, commanded to "increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:22; 8:17). And prior to the Flood, all are expected to be vegetarians (an intriguing moral idealization of nature, perhaps indicative of "troubled consciences" about killing even to eat and also of a consciousness of the flawed state of existence). Indeed, the story as a whole represents at least "a partial displacement of [the hu]man from the central place in the drama of becoming."[25] In Psalm 104, the components of creation are celebrated, and God is praised for comprehensive benevolence *apart from* any human values. Similarly, in Job 38–41, the author not only stresses human humility in the presence of divine mystery, but also assumes God's positive evaluations of the whole creation *apart from* any human utility. God's compassion covers the whole creation (Ps. 145:9). Thus, the creation and its creatures have divinely-imparted value independent of human interests, and this value exists even in a wild, virginal state, prior to and apart from the taming, technological transformations of human managers.

Divine valuations appear to be cosmocentric and biocentric, not simply or primarily anthropocentric. As a gift of divine love, the world was created as a habitat not only for humanity but also for all living beings. Old Testament scholar Claus Westermann states this perspective forcefully:

> The simple fact that the first page of the Bible speaks about heaven and earth, the sun, moon, and stars, about birds, fish, and animals, is a certain sign that the God whom we acknowledge in the Creed as the Father of Jesus Christ is concerned with all these creations, and not merely with humans. *A God who is understood only as the god of humankind is no longer the God of the Bible.*[26]

The logic of the doctrine of creation itself leads to a similar conclusion. Its stresses on divine sovereignty and universal providence imply that the Creator is concerned about the whole of creation and all

its parts, not only the human parts. Ethically, since fidelity to God implies respect for divine valuations, Christians are called to honor and nurture what God honors and nurtures, and that includes the whole good creation.

For the Christian faith, however, the affirmation of the goodness of creation is also an expression of ultimate confidence in the goodness of God. The world now has an interim goodness. It is not to be despised or rejected or transcended; it is to be appreciated and valued as an expression of the goodness of God. It overflows with marvels and sustains diverse forms of life, for a time. Yet, it is also a world of systemic alienation, in which all life is temporary and destructive of other life. Empirically speaking, the classical theological propositions that the Creator and the creation are "very good" are virtually indefensible, in my view, apart from an eschatological expectation. The creation needs liberation and reconciliation. Thus the Christian church has always linked creation and redemption, though in most of its historical forms, it has strangely excluded otherkind from the realm of redemption. Christ is the mediator of creation (John 1:1-3; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2-3). To say with the Nicene Creed that "all things were made" through Christ is to affirm that the creation as a whole has a redemptive purpose from the beginning. The creation is going on to perfection, ultimately. It is very good because it is being brought to fulfillment by a good God—an expectation that, as I shall argue in the next chapter, enhances Christian responsibility for ecological protection.

THE ECOLOGICAL COVENANT OF RELATIONALITY

The Noachic or Rainbow Covenant (Gen. 9:8-17) is often interpreted as a powerful biblical symbol for ecological responsibility. But the story of the Flood as a whole (Gen. 6–9) is morally ambiguous, like so many other stories in scripture. The primitive portrait of God is hardly flattering; this is no compassionate deity! An angry God, infuriated by human wickedness, creates a worldwide ecological crisis, saves a remnant of every animal species, and then vows, in apparent remorse, never to do it again, no matter how severe the provocation. Nevertheless, the story symbolizes a cosmic covenant that is built into the earthly ecosphere and the effects of which are empirically verifiable. There is a rational order of interdependence—which Christians also see as a moral, purposive order of relationality and ecological integrity—that appears to be universal and that demands respectful adaptability from moral agents. This myth

conveys a truth that must be incorporated into any ecologically sensitive Christian theology and ethics.

In the Noachic covenant (the rainbow being its sign), God is portrayed as making an unconditional pledge in perpetuity to all humanity, to all other creatures, and to the earth itself, to preserve *all* species and their environments. God will be inclusively faithful. The commitment is self-binding, unending, and unrestricted. All species are given the blessing of fertility, to "increase and multiply" (Gen. 8:7) and repopulate the earth. This "ecological covenant,"[27] along with the story of Noah's Ark itself, implicitly recognizes the interdependent relationships of all creatures in their ecosystems. Humans and all other land animals perish together in the flood, and representative remnants of humans and all other land animals are saved together in the Ark. The covenant (9:17) means that "all flesh, all life on the earth, every living being in the millennia of the history of nature and of humanity is preserved in God's affirmation of . . . creation."[28] It is a "covenant of peace," a sign of God's "steadfast love" in one prophetic interpretation (Isa. 54:9-10). It also suggests that the Creator's purpose is to provide living space for all organisms,[29] so that all may share the earth together. The Noachic Covenant is a symbol of the unbreakable bonds among all creatures and with their Creator.

Moreover, the ecological covenant—indeed, every covenant in scripture—assumed responsibilities to future generations of humanity. The covenant is "with you and your offspring forever" (Gen. 13:15). This refrain is frequent in the Old Testament; the "solidarity of the generations" is taken for granted.[30] A transgenerational continuity and set of obligations link past, present, and future. Christianity subsequently embraced this idea, of which the affirmation of the church militant and triumphant is a part. The contemporary value of ecological sustainability finds strong support in the Hebraic-Christian concept of covenant.

This story also provides a symbolic mandate for responsive loyalty to God's ecological fidelity. Though the Noachic Covenant is not typical of other covenants in the Old Testament, it still demands human moral responsibility. The divine promise entails human obligation because faithfulness to God entails loyalty to God's covenants. Similarly, the ecological covenant, which is built into nature's order of interdependence, requires caring and careful responses from humans. Environmental contempt, manifested, for example, in ozone depletion, global warming, and extinctions, is a violation of the Rainbow Covenant and the ecological covenant that it symbolizes. It is, therefore, an attack on

the created order itself. It is disloyalty to God, other creatures, other humans, future generations, and ourselves, for we are all bound together with common interests in saving the ecological integrity of our home, the earth.[31] Moreover, respect for relationality will be a sign of the New Covenant, the new ecological and eschatological order, which also is envisioned as inclusive of all creatures in interdependence, but, in addition, will be truly harmonious (Isa. 11:6-9; Hos. 2:18).

DIVINE IMAGE AND DOMINION AS RESPONSIBLE REPRESENTATION

Humans are created, according to Genesis 1:26-28, to be the *image* of God and to exercise *dominion* in relation to all other life forms. The meaning of these two related concepts has been the subject of numerous speculations and debates among exegetes and theologians in Christian history. Rarely, however, has the debate been on center stage. Dominion particularly has been a secondary issue, generally assumed but frequently neglected analytically. Yet, in recent years, dominion particularly has become a major pejorative in the ecological complaint against Christianity. Antidominionism has been a main plank in the platform of those who accuse Christianity of being an antiecological religion. But what do these concepts mean historically? And in the light of recent bludgeonings, can they be revived for our time?

The complaints against the concepts of image and dominion are somewhat surprising in the light of most of Christian history and its Hebraic roots. Both the divine image and human dominion are rare concepts in the Old Testament, and are associated exclusively (except, in the case of dominion, for Ps. 8:5-8) with the P segments of Genesis. Neither apparently had significance in the rest of the Old Testament.[32] The concept of divine image appears ten times in the New Testament, and is used as a means of interpreting Christ or relationships to Christ, and never in an ecological context. Dominion in the sense of Genesis 1 is absent from the New Testament.

In subsequent Christian history, dominion in an ecological sense was widely assumed, but it was certainly not always or generally the dominion of exploitation. In his extensive study of Jewish and Christian interpretations of Genesis 1:28 from biblical antiquity to the Reformation, Jeremy Cohen concludes: "Rarely, if ever, did premodern Jews and Christians construe this verse as a license for the selfish exploitation of the environment. Although most readers of

Genesis casually assumed that God had fashioned the physical world for the benefit of human beings, Genesis 1:28 evoked relatively little concern with the issue of dominion over nature."[33] In the Desert Fathers, the Celtic saints, and Francis of Assisi, for example, dominion was taken for granted, but it was usually the dominion of benevolence, not exploitation, and it was assumed that this benevolence was the normative state of Eden. John Wesley, moreover, like others before him, interpreted dominion as the mediation of divine blessings to nonhuman creatures.[34] In fact, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England and elsewhere, a prominent minority of divines—especially among Puritans, Dissenters, and later evangelicals, like Methodists—interpreted dominion as a command *against* tyrannical cruelty or abuse and a mandate for guardianship and benevolence.[35]

Thus for much of Christian history and for many Christians, dominion seems to have been a relatively dormant and often beneficial concept ecologically. Similarly, debates about the image of God have centered not on ecological relationships, but rather predominantly on theological anthropology. In fact, the image has become an extremely valuable grounding for social justice. It has served as a basic affirmation of equal human rights for racial-ethnic minorities, religious groups, women, and the citizens of all nations. In the present theological situation, the image is a secondary issue and dominion is a marginal one, as they have been in most of Christian history. This claim is illustrated by the fact that in the entries of two recent, prominent reference works, *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*[36] and the *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*,[37] dominion is listed in neither and the image is discussed briefly and only in the one on ethics.

Still, exploitative interpretations of dominion or functional equivalents have been present in recent Christian history, and at times have been prominent, especially in some Christian-influenced cultures during and after the Enlightenment as "secular" rationalizations for settling (or unsettling) new territories and implementing technological developments. Too frequently and falsely in recent centuries, both the image of God and dominion have been interpreted as the divine grant of a special status making humanity the sole bearer of intrinsic value in creation, or of a special, divine mandate to pollute, plunder, and prey on creation to the point of exhausting its potential.

Contemporary exegesis, however, makes it increasingly clear what the image and dominion in Genesis 1 are *not*. They are not mandates for oppression or sanctions for despotic, totalitarian rule over nature. Approval for the exercise of absolute or unlimited power is alien to

Genesis 1 and to the Old Testament as a whole. Humans are creatures; they are always subject to divine dominion. The land is God's; it is entrusted to humanity to "till and keep" (Gen. 2:15) in accord with God's ground rules—which even include a soil conservation mandate to let the land rest every seven years (Lev. 25:3-5; Exod. 23:10-11). In fact, the ecological world over which the images of God have dominion in Genesis 1 is one in which universal vegetarianism is divinely mandated (1:29-30). And even when meat-eating and other destructive acts are permitted after the Flood, these acts are circumscribed by a rule against taking life lightly (9:2-4)—and also by other divine expectations on justice in scripture. The delivery of all animals into humans' hands for food, and the consequent fear and dread of humans by other creatures, is not a license for despotism, but rather appears to be a simple recognition of the ecological reality that humans are comparatively omnivorous and very effective predators.

Anthropocentric oppression of nature, from this perspective, is not a representation but rather a usurpation of divine sovereignty. It is playing God in hubris.[38] It is a distortion of the image and a perversion of dominion. It is a projection rather than a revelation, since it makes God into the image of arrogant humans. Genuine dominion in Genesis 1 and 9, however, as Lloyd Steffen argues, is "a divine counterpoint and judgment on domination."[39] The image and dominion in Genesis, therefore, are not grounds for abuse of nature. The saints who interpreted these concepts as mandates for benevolence appear to have read the texts accurately to this point.

But what are the positive meanings of image and dominion in Genesis? The image of God has been interpreted in remarkably various ways in Christian history. The image has been understood as: rationality, personality, moral agency, moral freedom, immortality, cocreativity, spirituality, relationality with God, accountability to God, and loving capacities.[40] Perhaps all of these overlapping interpretations and more (except for immortality, a foreign concept in the Old Testament) were in the mind of P. However, the text itself is uncomfortably vague.

Most Old Testament scholars agree that the main root of the idea is in the "royal ideology" of the ancient near East, where a statue or viceroy functioned as the symbolic image or representative of the ruler's authority over a territory or people in the ruler's absence.[41] This delegated authority, however, is not unrestricted or oppressive: in the Hebraic mind, the earthly ruler is subject to the rules of God's justice; she/he is the guardian of the good (Ps. 72 especially). Dominion connotes

"just governance."[42] Understood in this sense, humans act in the image of God when they are *responsible representatives,* reflecting like governors or ambassadors of antiquity the interests of their Sovereign.[43] The image is not identical with but it includes dominion as a feature of the image.[44] The image incorporates the God-given assignment to exercise dominion or governance *in accord with God's values.* Humans practice dominion properly when they care for God's creation benevolently and justly in accord with the will of the ultimate owner.

The image of God (including dominion), then, is not a special status as the sole bearer of intrinsic value or a special sanction to destroy with impunity, but rather a special role or function—a vocation, calling, task, commission, or assignment. Applied ecologically, the image concept recognizes a basic biological fact: humans alone have evolved the peculiar rational, moral, and, therefore, creative capacities that enable us alone to serve as responsible representatives of God's interests and values, to function as protectors of the ecosphere and self-constrained consumers of the world's goods. The image is as much a responsibility as a right ecologically.

The New Testament understanding of the image of God only enhances this sense of ecological responsibility. Christ is the perfection of the image and, therefore, presumably the paradigm of dominion (II Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; John 1:14-18).[45] This concept has ethical implications. Christ is the moral model. Christians are to imitate or mirror the love of Christ (Eph. 5:1-2). Love is the essence of the image, and the assignment of Christians is to reflect that love in relationships with all that God loves. Thus when interpreted in the context of Christ, the realization of the image and the proper expression of dominion are not manifestations of exploitation, but rather *representations of nurturing and serving love.*[46] That is a reason why one of the basic questions for Christian ecological ethics is how to express love, including justice, in an ecological context.

Yet, any contemporary, empirically sensitive reinterpretation of human dominion must be a narrowly defined one. It is important to note, for example, that dominion was neither possible nor necessary until those late-coming moral agents, *Homo sapiens,* with their creative and destructive capacities, entered the evolutionary scene. Until then, the planet thrived biologically without human assistance—and its greatest threats have come recently only as a consequence of human exploitation. God displayed cosmocentric and biocentric values and involvements long before humans arrived, and continues to do so today. Humans have never played any role, and almost certainly never

will, in the impenetrable stretches of the universe, and have played only very recent roles, and frequently destructive ones, in the evolutionary and geological histories of this planet (though future generations may have good reasons for worrying about the health of this solar system). In this context, the idea that the earth, let alone the whole creation, was made for "man" is not only ludicrous but sinfully arrogant. It is a cultural addendum to the Christian faith, and a violation of the integrity of that faith.

These realities suggest that dominion has narrow implications: it is primarily the protection of the planet and its inhabitants *by* humans *against* human exploitation. Furthermore, these realities suggest that the primary goal of dominion may be to preserve and restore as much as possible, compatible with human physical and cultural needs, the natural systems and dynamics that would prevail without the presence of modern humanity.

None of this denies, however, that humans must "subdue"—yes, trample, conquer, and the other strong connotations of the Hebrew word *kabash* (including in modern slang)—the earth's resistance in order to survive and maintain cultures. Contrary to the romantic view of nature, the much-maligned but realistic writer of Genesis 1:26-28 chose the right word! He probably meant, however, little more than agricultural cultivation, similar to the tilling and keeping in Gen. 2:15.[47] Some degree of domination *of* nature by humans is necessary to prevent the domination of humans *by* nature (which has been the pattern in human history until relatively recently, as plagues, pestilences, and famines testify). The ecosphere is potentially hospitable to human interests, but that hospitality must be coerced by overcoming the earth's manifestations of seeming hostility or neutrality—for instance, predators and parasites or floods and flames. From the beginning, the survival of the human species in relation to the rest of nature has been a nasty, brutish, short, and otherwise Hobbesian struggle for food, clothing, shelter, fuel, health, and other basics. Human ingenuity—manifested in plows, shovels, axes, weapons, medicines, and their modern, sophisticated equivalents—has been a necessity for primitive survival and the construction of civilizations.

The ecological crisis is not a consequence of "kabashing" per se. Survivors in the biophysical world have no choice but to do that. Instead, the ecological crisis is a result of imperialistic overextension—abusing what is divinely intended for use, subduing far beyond the point of necessity, imaging despotism rather than dominion, and failing to nurture benevolently and justly nature's potential hospitality.

It is sin. Whatever tendencies are inherent in the word "subduing" for overreaching human bounds are checked and balanced by the biblical concepts of image and dominion themselves, and by other moral constrictions in scripture and subsequent Christian history.

The original concepts of image and dominion have some rich ecological potential. The Christian church would do well to preserve, revise, and highlight them. Yet, the church is certainly not bound to the words. *Dominion*, after all, is a Latin-derived translation from the Hebrew. It seems to distort the meaning of the original concept, because it often connotes tyrannical domination to many contemporary minds. Other words, probably in combinations, may better convey the original connotations: *Guardian*, *Protector*, *Defender*, and *Preserver*, all of which have been used as titles for the practitioners of just governance in other periods. Thus the Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of the Earth, Worldwatch Institute, and Greenpeace embody in their organizational names parts of the essential meaning of dominion!

I and many others, however, have negative reactions to some descriptions, for instance, *caretaker*, *gardener*, and especially *manager*—all of which have been associated with anthropocentric abuse and the strictly instrumental evaluation of nature. Management is a concept that makes sense contextually, for instance, in agriculture, tree-farming, and wild habitat restoration. But it is a wildly arrogant notion when applied universally to describe human relationships with the whole biosphere. Many things are best left alone. Similarly, some have strong reactions to *conservation* and especially to *steward* and *stewardship*. Though the ethical concept of stewardship justifiably has positive connotations to many Christians, implying love and service, it has negative ones for substantial numbers of environmentalists (including many Christians). Stewardship conveys to them, because of historical associations with Gifford Pinchot and others in this century, the notion of anthropocentric and instrumental management of the biosphere as humanly owned "property" and "resources."[48] In the light of these attitudes, I am ambivalent about the use of the word and the concept of *stewardship* to describe human relationships with and attitudes toward the biosphere.

Yet, perhaps the bottom line is this: the strict constructionists and sectarians who yearn for ideological and verbal purity in the environmental movement do well to pay less attention to words and more to values and commitments. They might find a fair number of allies, including among those "unregenerates" who are content with *conservation*, *stewardship*, or even *dominion*. My emerging attitude

toward these verbal squabbles is the same as Rhett's final words to Scarlett in *Gone with the Wind.*

THE INCARNATION AS COSMIC REPRESENTATION

"The Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). This simple affirmation of divine incarnation has been the source of more than a little controversy in Christian theology. It has been understood variously, with positions ranging from Chalcedonian literalism (Jesus Christ being the "full substance" of both God and the human) to mythological interpretations. Despite this diversity, however, there is a widespread (though not universal) consensus in Christian theology that God and human essence were definitively associated, and in solidarity, in Jesus of Nazareth. In the life and ministry, humiliation and glorification, of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christian church experienced its decisive encounter with the saving Christ. The fullness of divine grace stooped to enter the human condition, becoming immanent in the material, identifying with the finite, disclosing both the nature of the redemptive God and the character of the redeemed human. This relational mystery of faith has significant ecological implications, and they do not appear to be restricted to a particular interpretation of the Incarnation.

Jesus is not only the Representative of God, in being the decisive reflection of divine love, but also the Representative of Humanity, in being the decisive expression of basic humanness and the fullness of humankind's historical potential for love. In identifying with this Representative of Humanity, however, God entered into solidarity not only with all humanity, but also with the whole biophysical world that humans embody and on which their existence depends. The Representative of Humanity, therefore, is also the Representative of the biosphere, even the ecosphere, indeed, the universe. The Universal Representative is the cosmic Christ, not only as the one who illuminates the love of the Creator of the cosmos, but also as the one who unites all things and holds all things together before God (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:15-20).

The very nature of being human is to exist as *imago mundi,* a reflection as embodiment of the biophysical world.[49] This idea is hardly new in Christian history. The theme is common in Patristic theology, combined with the assumption that Christ would save all that he embodied. The Greek theologians were fond of saying that humans are the microcosm that represents the macrocosm, past and present—"a microcosm in

which all previous creatures are to be found again, a being that can only exist in community with all other created beings and which can only understand itself in that community."[50] Humans exist *in* nature and as *part* of nature. The atoms in human bodies were once part of other creatures, including the original organisms. The chemical and genetic structures of the cells in our bodies are remarkably similar to the cells in all other creatures, including bacteria, grasses, and fish. We have evolved through adaptive interactions, along with all other creatures, from common ancestors, and we continue to exist in symbiotic relationships with all other species. We are embodiments of biotic history on this planet, incorporating all simpler systems in evolution. Through the flora and fauna (including microorganisms), minerals, chemicals, and even radiation that we ingest through the natural processes of eating, drinking, digesting, and breathing, humans embody a representative sampling of all the elements of the ecosphere. We carry within ourselves "the signature of the supernovas and the geology and life history of the Earth."[51] These connections are symbolized in Genesis 2:7 by the formation of humans and other creatures from the same substance, the humus. Humans are representatives of the earth, interdependent parts of nature—and this totality is what God became immersed in through association with the Representative of Humanity in the Incarnation.

The ecological implications of this interpretation of the Incarnation are significant, and have long been recognized in some segments of the Christian church. The Incarnation confers dignity not only on humankind, but on everything and everyone, past and present, with which humankind is united in interdependence—corporeality, materiality, indeed, the whole of the earthly and heavenly. It sanctifies the biophysical world, making all things and kinds meaningful and worthy and valuable in the divine scheme. It justifies "biophilia," the affiliation with and affection for the diversity of life forms.[52] Thus the venerable St. John of Damascus (c. 675–c. 749), in reaction to the neo-Platonic denigration of the material, expresses the appropriate Christian attitude toward the biophysical in response to the Incarnation (as well as to the creation and consummation):

> I do not worship matter. I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take his abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honouring the matter which wrought my salvation! I honour it, but not as God. . . . Because of this I salute all remaining matter with reverence, because God has filled it with his grace and power. Through it my salvation has come to me.[53]

Nothing then is worthless. Everything has moral value and is worthy of appropriate care and concern. "Spiritual" contempt for the material or earthly, indifference to the fate of other humans and other species, and exclusively anthropocentric valuations in general are rejected—all because the Source of life, matter, and value affiliated in love with the Representative of Humanity and, therefore, with the Representative of the Cosmos.

The Incarnation also sanctions human humility, reminding us of our common roots and connections with other kinds. This recognition of relationships does not diminish human dignity; it enhances it, partly by deflating one of humankind's most unflattering characteristics, the arrogance of exclusivity. It also elevates the status of nonhuman creatures, making them worthy of moral consideration. H. Richard Niebuhr gives a good description of this attitude. He argues that the revelation of God involves a change in the "moral law," so that all creatures and things are "within the network of moral relations,"[54] and subsequently adds: "When the Creator is revealed it is no longer necessary to defend man's place by a reading of history which establishes his superiority to all other creatures. To be a man does not now mean to be a lord of the beasts but a child of God. To know the person [Christ] is to lose all sense of shame because of kinship with the clod and the ape."[55]

This incarnationally-induced humility, however, is constantly resisted through theological devices. The Incarnation, for example, does not mean that the biophysical world has a "derived dignity," in which any dignity or moral status ascribed to the biophysical world is derived from human dignity, since God affiliated with a human.[56] Similar notions occur regularly in Christian history. Yet this perspective seems to be a harmful vestige of anthropocentrism, since it declines to recognize nature's full value in itself. In fact, in the light of evolution and ecology, it is more accurate to say that any dignity ascribed to humanity is derived from our natural history. The intrinsic value or worth of human beings seems to me to be indefensible apart from the intrinsic value or worth of the biophysical world as a whole, of which human beings are descendants and inseparable parts. The Incarnation, however, is not an issue of creaturely derivation or mediation. The Representative of Humanity is *simultaneously and interrelationally* the Representative of the Cosmos, the Cosmic Christ. The incarnated God embraced the whole. The only "derived dignity" is *from* the Creator to *all* creatures.[57]

We are yet a long way from understanding the practical implications of

the Incarnation for ecological responsibility, but at least this much can be said with reasonable confidence: When humans destroy life and habitats, as predatorial creatures must to survive in this morally ambiguous world, we should do so sparingly, carefully, and reverently, in recognition of the Incarnation and its consequent duty of respect for our co-evolving kin. Wanton pollution, profligate consumption, and human-induced extinctions are sins from the perspective of the Incarnation.

SACRAMENTAL PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT

The world is filled with the glory of God (Isa. 6:3; Ps. 19:1; Eph. 4:6). That has been a common Christian claim. The biophysical world provides traces of and testimonies to the mystery and majesty of God. But these "natural" revelations are not simply evidence left behind like clues in a mystery or footprints in the sand; they are also signs, even vehicles, of God's presence. The holy (not wholly) transcendent God is also immanent in the creation. The natural is simultaneously preternatural.

God exists *in* the creation as the Holy Spirit,[58] the Lifegiver in the Nicene Creed. According to various descriptions in Christian theology, this personal, vivifying Presence reconciles, liberates, enlightens, inspires, guides, counsels, comforts, suffers with, nurtures, strengthens, transforms, renews, sanctifies, empowers, and prods created being in its pilgrimage to its destiny disclosed in Christ. As the immanent Spirit, God is intimate with the creation, actively involved, self-revealing, and grace-dispensing, leaving signs and making the divine presence felt in all things—in personal, cultural, and natural histories.

Consequently, the data relevant for faith commitments and theological/philosophical reflections are comprehensive, encompassing the whole of experience—past and present, aesthetic and scientific, mystical and moral, sociological and psychological, subjective and objective, cultural and natural. Indeed, the primary source of faith and the primary data for theological reflection are, as they were in a fair share of scripture and tradition, religious experiences mediated through the sensate. By *religious experiences*, I am referring to the revelatory intimations, intuitions, and illuminations of the divine that come under various names and categories: "witness of the Spirit," the "still, small voice," Buber's I-Thou encounter, the ecstatic visions of the mystics, communion, Schleiermacher's feeling of absolute dependence, Rudolf Otto's *Mysterium Tremendum*, Jonathan Edwards' "sense of the heart," and Peter Berger's "signals of transcendence."[59] These

experiences are often so decisively authoritative for the experiencer, so immediate and so compelling, so integrating, so strong a foundation for a vibrant faith, that they may provide an existential argument for the reality of the redeeming God.

No doubt, these experiences are notoriously subjective. They can be—and probably often are—more projection and illusion than revelation. They must be subjected, therefore, to tests of coherence and adequacy. Nonetheless, these experiences cannot be dismissed or excluded. To restrict the database of faith and theology to scripture and tradition (which in themselves are often testimonies from the *past* to "spiritual" encounters), and to exclude general revelation, "natural theology," or mystical experiences, is an arbitrary limitation on the freedom of the Spirit and a denial of God's presence and *present* revelations. This stress on divine immanence breaks down the classical discontinuities between Creator and creation, faith and reason, natural and supernatural, and sacred and secular. It is a revolt against the perception of God as an absentee landlord who enters the premises only for miraculous repairs. It is an affirmation that the hidden, transcendent God is encountered, albeit ambiguously, in the totality of experience through divine immanence.[60]

Thus we live in a "sacramental universe," as William Temple eloquently argued, in which the whole of material existence is essentially holy, because it can be an effective medium of revelation and a vehicle of communion with God, a means of grace. The creation is a sacramental expression of the Creator.[61] Since God dwells in the creation and not in deistic isolation, the world is the bearer of the holy, the temple of the Spirit. For the spiritually receptive, therefore, the cosmos is a complex of sacramental signs that convey the hidden but real presence of the Spirit "in, with, and under" the natural elements. The sacramental presence of the Spirit is the extension of the Incarnation of Christ—and, in fact, the two have often been connected in Christian thought and piety.

The omnipresent God can be encountered anywhere, as countless Christians have testified—in the cathedral and cell, in the community and in solitude, in the faces of people and the faceless silence, in the city and wilderness, in nature and culture. No places are necessarily better than others, and perhaps all are necessary for spiritual wholeness. But different places do appear to have, by association, different characters and consequences. Thus the intuition of the Spirit's presence in power and love in the biophysical world has been a potent force in the

development of a human appreciation, admiration, and affection for nature, with both spiritual and ethical consequences.

The natural world has been a prime place for encounters with the grandeur and glory of God. The major reason may be that nature in the raw is relatively unencumbered (though tragically today, decreasingly and almost never totally so) with humanly created artifacts, and, thus, contributes to a feeling of being present in the midst of God's comparatively pure creativity. It arouses a cosmic consciousness, a sense of intimacy, a numinous feeling of creaturely awe in the presence of awe-full majesty that is "beyond apprehension and comprehension."[62] Joseph Wood Krutch, for instance, argued that the desert prompts mystical contemplation and contributed to the emergence of Hebraic religion: "The desert itself seems to brood and to encourage brooding. To the Hebrews the desert spoke of God, and one of the most powerful of all religions was born."[63] This hypothesis is simplistic, but it is worthy of exploration. It is hardly disharmonious with significant portions of Christian history. The desert and other wild or semiwild places have often been viewed as places of contemplation and encounter with God,[64] as witnessed, for example, by the Desert Fathers and perhaps even Jesus' forty days in the wilderness "with the wild beasts" (Mark 1:12-13). The Celtic and other saints saw the natural world as a theophany, which apparently encouraged their affection for the entities that convey the divine presence. Similarly, the Romantic poets who were Christians often displayed an awareness of divine immanence, even though the sacramental scenes that the British representatives celebrated were generally a "humanized nature," domesticated and defanged.[65] Even some contemporary church camps in attractive natural settings appear to have been intended originally to encourage this sacramental consciousness. The theme of sacramental presence in nature, therefore, is a common one in Christian history. Implicitly at least, ecosystems are understood by many as God's primal "holy orders" and places of "holy communion."

Probably most Christians with a vital interest in the dynamics of the biophysical world, and many with far less intense interests, have at least occasionally experienced its sacramentality. Because of the inadequacies of verbalization and the penetrating depth of the intuitions, these experiences both defy and demand descriptions. Generally, these experiences take the form of an acute awareness that the natural world is omnimiraculous, filled with the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary. Thus the natural growth of a vine becomes more awesome than the magical transformation of water into wine. That is only one of

innumerable biological and ecological wonders that surround us, that we normally ignore, and that we often mask with cultural veneers (alleged "improvements"). In a wild or semiwild setting, where humans, as products of culture, are more observers than participants, the numinous sense of the miraculous often arises, and it arouses in the predisposed an awareness and appreciation of the Source.

These sacramental experiences are morally and spiritually regenerative. They are often accompanied by a host of intermixed feelings: gratitude and joy; creaturely humility yet exaltation; solitude yet communion; frequently fear but always awe; a recognition of mystery combined with a feeling of ultimate coherence; pleasure despite the physical demands, discomforts, and sometimes dangers; and a moral yearning to preserve these holy places and subjects from cultural invasions. One senses a sublime beauty surpassing violent origins and ugly details,[66] and a providential order in the midst of apparent chaos.

In its full or at least adequate state, this sacramentality is not romantic or sentimental: it encounters God in the rainbow and the hurricane, in cute critters like Bambi and in the cougar that ambushes and eats Bambi. The sacramental sense, however, is possible for most of us only when one is not fighting to save life or limb, only when one is more an observer of than a participant in the natural struggle for survival, and only when one is the bearer of cultural benefits like proper clothing, tools, and knowledge about natural dynamics. Terror is the normal and proper response to some situations, like being lost amidst the dangers of the desert or confronting an aggressive lion. However, on those occasions when the sacramental sense is a possibility, the experience can be regenerative. Whether stalking an elegant trogon in a southeastern Arizona canyon, or watching an osprey dive for a trout, or a fox pouncing on a mouse, or wandering through a flourishing forest or prairie, or microscopically examining the marvelously intricate and dynamic interactions within an organic cell, or gazing into infinite space at innumerable blazing stars, or exulting with that pious naturalist John Muir over the "wild beauty-making business" of "a noble earthquake" as an "expression of God's love,"[67] numerous men and women have been filled with awe and wonder, moved to humility and contemplation, perplexed by the paradox of holistic order through brutal predation, overpowered by a sense of mystery, and yet strangely grasped by the consciousness of God's loving presence.

This understanding of sacramentality emphatically denies that the Christian faith desacralizes nature. Contrary to a common viewpoint

among Christian and non-Christian interpreters alike, nature is sacred by association, as the bearer of the sacred. We are standing perpetually on holy ground, because God is present not only in the burning bush but in the nurturing soil and atmosphere, indeed, sharing the joys and agonies of all creatures. The sacramental presence of the Spirit endows all of creation with a sacred value and dignity. Unlike animism and polytheism, which assigned natural objects to different deities or divided nature among competing gods, Christian monotheism provides an integrated, relational world view: "The world is one because God is one. Not only that, but God made the material world one . . . in the sense that all things are made to exist in each other and to be mutually supportive of each other."[68] Christian monotheism, therefore, is not the culprit in desacralization, contrary to Arnold Toynbee. The sacramental presence of the one Spirit does not desacralize but rather sacralizes nature.

Sacramentality also dedivinizes nature: the biophysical world is *not* part of God. Sacramentality is not pantheistic. Perhaps it can instead be described as *pan-en-theistic* in the sense that God is *in all* and all is somehow *in God* without being part of God. The metaphysical problem is how to insure that nothing exists apart from God and still assert that creatures are distinctive entities. The idea of the world as God's "body,"[69] however, suggests a merger of Creator and creation. Most theologians, therefore, have been reluctant to use, or have rigorously opposed, this image. The "body" metaphor seems to compromise divine independence, and deny the distinctive integrity of creation and its creatures. It may contribute to animism and idolatry. It certainly adds nothing to the value and lovableness of nature that is not already accomplished through the traditional affirmation of the sacramental presence of the Spirit. The creation and its creatures are finite and transient; they are not divine and are, therefore, not to be worshiped. Yet they are still to be valued and loved, since they are valued and loved by God as the mode of spiritual presence and residence, God's beloved habitat. Christian sacramentality sacralizes but does not divinize nature.

Nature sacramentality, moreover, is a sensate spirituality. It experiences God in and through the "distractions" of the biophysical world, not by blocking the senses and transcending them. Consequently, it is genuinely mystified by what is technically and now popularly known as "desert spirituality" in contemplative disciplines.[70] In this conception, the term *desert* is often used metaphorically and psychologically, not geographically or ecologically. The so-called desert is any place of solitude, simplicity, and emptiness—a barren

wasteland, figuratively—to which one withdraws for undistracted communication with God.[71] One closes one's eyes and blocks out the other senses in order to experience the Spirit with utmost clarity. The process is seemingly transcendental rather than sacramental.

The metaphorical desert, however, is the antithesis of ecological desert, for the latter is rarely barren or a wasteland (except on anthropocentric, especially economic, assumptions); it is usually teeming with interacting life and beautiful distractions. Metaphorical desert spirituality is to ecological desert spirituality as plastic trees are to an ancient redwood forest. The metaphorical type seems to lose the particular feelings of awe, wonder, marvel, gratitude, and ecological sensitivity that arise from associations with the omnimiraculous in wild places. In contrast, the sensate spirituality of the desert opens all the senses—touch, taste, sound, sight, smell—to experience God sacramentally in and through all created being. The biophysical reality of the real desert and other wild ecosystems are not distractions or diversions from God, but rather mediations of the Spirit.

So-called desert spirituality certainly has a valuable place in a total discipline of prayer, but the term is an ecologically insensitive misnomer that may give "aid and comfort" to ecologically insensitive acts. If the spirituality of the desert can be experienced in any isolated, artificial setting, who needs to save the genuine article? Not only should the term be restricted to ecological places of encounter, but the spiritual disciplines should be recognized as truncated without a sensate spirituality associated with real deserts and other wild places.

As the habitation of the Spirit and the context of sacramental presence, the cosmos is a sacred place. Its integrity, therefore, demands moral respect and responsibility. We are created to live together in the fullest possible accord with God's justice and peace, as valued parts of God's beloved habitat, and ours.[72] The diversity, vitality, and beauty of this habitat must be protected, certainly for its own sake, but also for the sake of humanity's physical *and* spiritual well-being.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIRM FOUNDATIONS:

DOCTRINES OF SIN, JUDGMENT, REDEMPTION, AND CHURCH

The ecological relevance of Christian theology is not exhausted by the doctrines of creation, covenant, divine image, incarnation, and spiritual presence. Other less-noted doctrinal affirmations also have important ecological implications. This chapter is a continuation of chapter 4. It focuses on the ecological significance of Christian understandings of sin, judgment, cosmic redemption, and the church. I conclude with a summary of the chief implications of a "reformed" Christian theology for Christian ecological perspectives and responsibilities.

SIN AS AN ECOLOGICAL DISORDER

A perennial problem in Christianity is the tendency to define the meaning of sin too narrowly or even to reduce it to triviality. Sin too often has been functionally limited, for example, to sexual misdeeds, and sometimes to sexual deeds themselves. Instead, the concept of sin is broad and complex in meaning, and is an indispensable element in Christian theology. In our time particularly, the meaning of sin must be properly extended to cover ecological misdeeds, and the human condition underlying them. The ecological crisis and the host of actions contributing to that crisis are best understood in the context of sin. This interpretation alerts us to the powers behind the plunderings and