The Resacralisation of Nature and its Implications for Environmentalism

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ABSTRACT

This paper is born from the premise that the desacralisation of nature is a significant contributor to our current environmental crisis. The first section examines how I arrive at this assertion, beginning with a sampling of societal structures and major developments in humanity's history accompanied by an assessment of the intersection of religious belief and environmental praxis in each of them. It provides a brief review of societal and religious factors that have shaped Western culture, focussing on those aspects that specifically influence how we relate to the natural environment. The paper then turns to the resacralisation of nature and how it may influence environmental praxis in the future. It explores emerging spiritual movements and revisits Christianity, evaluating how their belief systems define the human/nature relationship and how these relationships translate into environment awareness, practices and activism. A literature review was accompanied by interviews with residents of Wakefield, Quebec, a growing rural community that attracts people of all ages who choose to embrace environmentally sustainable lifestyles, often based on spiritual or religious foundations. My research concluded that while adherents of emerging spiritual movements typically embrace a deep sense of interconnection with the natural world, and consider themselves to be living within a sacred natural environment, this is oftentimes manifested in ritual activity rather than positive environmental action. For those who do exhibit positive environmental behaviour, it appears to be based on a shared ontology that defines a respect and reverence for nature. Many of my research participants chose to define this ontology in spiritual or religious terms, insisting on the presence of the divine in the natural world. However, this was not universal: those participants who did not identify as religious or spiritual shared both the ontology and the positive environmental praxis.

FOREWORD

I entered the MES program hoping to better understand the influence of religious belief systems and ideologies on the health of the natural environment. I assumed that the more ancient religions embraced a deeper spiritual connection to the natural world, which would be manifest in benign environmental praxis. With that in mind, I built my Plan of Study around the exploration of various religions, focussing on how their belief systems translated into environmental praxis. This path led me to examine humanity's various societal structures as they intersected with religious and spiritual ideologies, culminating in an in-depth examination of the events that led to the development of the Western (largely Christian) worldview, particularly as it pertains to the environment. Through this process, I came to believe that Western society's perception of a desacralised nature contributes significantly to harmful environmental praxis.

The first section of this paper provides a synthesis of this work. It summarises the elements of my coursework that are particularly relevant to the conclusion presented above. It then goes on to explore new territory not covered elsewhere in my studies: the resacralisation of nature and its potential effects on environmental practices. Throughout the latter half of the paper, I explore emerging spiritual movements and look at Christianity through fresh eyes in an effort to determine if their beliefs and ideologies may lead humanity towards more benign environmental praxis. This research provides a closing bookend to my earlier studies. In my coursework I explored the intersection of religion and environmental praxis among humanity's ancient and recent ancestors; through this research I look to Western humanity's spiritual relationship with the natural environment as exists today and how it may play out in the decades to come.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout humanity's history, we have created divine beings to help us understand the nature of our universe. The essence of our relationships with our deities—as well as the associated religious scriptures and dogma—has influenced our interaction with the natural world. These relationships have contributed to the environmental crises we face today and will continue to do so in the future. In this paper I join with a growing community of voices that argue that changing these relationships can help lead us towards benign, sustainable and respectful environmental practices.

This paper begins from the premise that our current environmental situation springs from a desacralisation of the natural world. In our earlier societal formats there existed a sense of the divine throughout the natural world: deities were immanent and made their homes in the rocks, trees, streams and mountains. Humans therefore treated these natural elements with respect and reverence lest they upset the deities and bring misfortune to themselves and their communities. This sense of reverence for nature is absent throughout much of the world today (particularly in the West), leaving us with the capacity to wreak destruction on our natural environment without fear of retribution, or, it seems, a second thought.

I will explore two major contributors to the desacralisation of nature: humanity's adoption of various societal structures, and secularisation. Humanity's religious relationships with the natural environment have assumed many forms over the course of human history, changing over time in response to ecological, demographic, technological, economic and political situations. These changes saw our gods migrate from their homes in the natural environment into the heavens where they were far removed from their former haunts. The secularisation process I refer to is not one based on politics (i.e. the separation of religion and state) but rather a social movement away from religious practice and a belief in the divine. This

was particularly prevalent during the scientific revolution in Europe, which will be discussed in some detail.

I make no claims that the desacralisation of nature is the sole contributor to humanity's environmental situation. It shares this position with many others, such as the lust for economic gain[1], globalisation[2], neo-liberalism[3] and overpopulation[4]. As much as these are all valid and interesting topics, they are outside the scope of my research. I do, however, believe that the desacralisation of our natural environment—as well as the social developments that I'll be exploring in the first section of this paper—has provided the context necessary for many of these conditions to thrive.

If the desacralisation of nature is at least partially responsible for our current situation, then it follows that the resacralisation of nature is required for us to reverse it. Such a process could shake the foundations of much that we in the West have come to understand as not only normal, but necessary. For example, the desire for increased energy consumption cannot be held in harmony with the understanding that unlimited (i.e. unsustainable) natural resource extraction is an affront to the essence of life. I don't suggest that all the atheists in the world

[1] Many researchers conclude that the link between economic growth and environmental degradation follows the inverted U-shaped Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC). Evidence shows that various indicators of environmental degradation (e.g. local air pollutants) increase with economic growth, until a turning point is reached in the economy, at which point the environmental indicators begin to decrease as the economy continues to grow. A decade ago, Yandle et al found no evidence to support the EKC hypothesis among gases such as carbon dioxide. This conclusion was echoed by Bassetti et al who found "a strong, long-run, positive relationship between income and carbon dioxide emissions" (117). Further, they suggest that consumption behavior associated within stronger economies enhances CO_2 levels (117).

[2] Globalisation, "the deployment of people, goods, economic activity and money across national borders" can be linked to greenhouse gas contributors such as transportation of goods, industrial activity and deforestation, as well as to other environmental damage such as impoverished biodiversity (Huwart and Verdier 13, 112-116).

[3] Neo-liberalism, in very broad terms, embraces a self-regulating market and supports policies such as deregulation and privatization of government-run institutions. This results in (amongst other things) increased consumerism and globalisation through free-trade agreements, commodification of the natural environment, privatization of natural resources and lack of oversight for the natural environment (McCarthy and Prudham 1-9).

[4] The current world population is 7 billion and is expected to reach more than 9 billion by 2050. Population growth contributes to many forms of environmental degradation by placing additional pressure on the use of the Earth's resources for human consumption. This includes such concerns as deforestation, natural resource extraction, pollution of land and oceans, fossil fuel combustion and fresh water scarcity (*Population Environment and Development*).

will—or should—suddenly "find God" or that monotheists will—or should—become pantheists overnight. Nor do I expect that our advanced societies will dispose of their technology and return to a hunter/gatherer lifestyle in order to recapture the perceived eco-sensibilities of the noble savage[5]. However, through this research I hope to better understand how humanity may establish a kinder, gentler relationship with our natural environment, and how religion and/or spirituality may feed into this view of the future. How might religious and spiritual groups influence environmental action in the future? Is the resacralisation of nature possible? What role can it play in environmental action?

To answer these questions, I look at both traditional religions as well as those that are emerging among people in the West who no longer relate to the Abrahamic religions that dominate our society. I uncover how traditional religions and emerging religious/spiritual movements currently relate to and interact with their natural environments, and how these groups may influence environmental action in the future. I explore the notion of resacralisation and how it is being played out in the Western world.

Terminology

For the purposes of this paper, I define religion as "an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods" ("Merriam Webster Dictionary."). It evokes a sense of somewhat rigid doctrine and the importance of sacred texts: adherents are discouraged from straying too far from the accepted agenda. Further, there is generally a hierarchy of governance within religious institutions and a membership ritual of some kind (baptism or something similar) is typically required. Spirituality, on the other hand, is a much more personal connection to the divine, often defined by the individual themself. The divine may or may not be identified with a god(s) and often takes on a non-anthropomorphic form (e.g. energy or love). I use the term 'spiritual movement' to describe an unstructured

[5] *Noble savage* is a term coined by John Dryden in the 17th century. It later came to describe an "idealized concept of uncivilized man, who symbolizes the innate goodness of one not exposed to the corrupting influences of civilization" ("Noble Savage").

community of people who share similar beliefs and ideologies (e.g. New Age). While spirituality and religion often overlap, I refer to them within this document as fairly distinct and separate phenomena.

The environmental crises I refer to throughout this document include a myriad of ecological and climatic phenomena, many of which result from global warming. Our planet is warming at rates unprecedented in recorded history, a trend that couldif continued unchecked—result in rising sea levels, extreme heat waves and erratic weather such as storms, flooding and drought. The impact on humanity will be significant: crops will fail, fisheries will collapse, extinction rates will rise and natural disasters such as wild fires and hurricanes will wreak havoc on a global scale. Given the human population's accelerated growth rate, the loss of available food sources is particularly ominous (Klein 13-14).

The current global warming trend is being exacerbated by human activity, largely in the form of greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel combustion. Carbon dioxide (a by-product of fossil fuel combustion), methane (a by-product of farming) and nitrous oxide are pooling in the earth's atmosphere, absorbing the sun's heat and radiating it back to the earth ("The Greenhouse Effect."). Natural resource extraction, in its many forms, is a significant contributor not only to global warming but other environmental devastation. The decimation of forests for agriculture, urbanisation, timber, fuel and food leads to soil erosion and increased desertification, loss of habitat for non-human animals, and the release of stored carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (Bradford). The practice of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, involves injecting large amounts of water, sand and chemicals into wells bored into shale in an effort to release the trapped natural gas. This practice is contested by environmental activists due to its alleged polluting of aquifers with toxic chemicals ("Unchecked Fracking Threatens Health, Water Supplies."). Oil extraction using traditional drilling practices can result in spills such as that seen in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 and can devastate the local ecosystem. Oil extraction from tar sands, such as those found in Alberta, requires large quantities of water and releases higher

levels of carbon dioxide than traditional methods of oil extraction[6]. Power plants, primarily those fueled by coal, are responsible for approximately 40% of the United States' and 25% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions ("About CARMA.").

Humanity's increased need for energy—due both to population growth and desire for energy-powered goods and services—is driving natural resource extraction (particularly fossil fuels) at an accelerated rate. There seems little regard for the fact that we live on a finite planet, and growth of the kind that we're seeing now (indeed growth of any kind) cannot be sustained indefinitely. Modest attempts are made at replenishing our renewable resources (e.g. through reforestation), however these cannot make up for the excessive rates of depletion ("Deforestation and Net Forest Area Change."). Fossil fuels are created through a natural process over millions of years and cannot be replaced by human production activity of any kind. Any resource depletion activity that does not allow for equal replenishment is considered, for the purposes of this paper, to be unsustainable.

In addition to global warming, I consider any human constructs and activities that threaten or destroy ecosystems to be contributors to our environmental crises. The list of such activities is long and varied; I provide a few examples here. Discarded plastic is gathering in the oceans, harming animals mistaking it for food ("Marine Problems: Pollution."). Sonar used for natural resource location and military exercises is damaging marine life (Tyack et al.) Pesticides and herbicides are carried through the air and waterways, destroying non-targeted organisms ("Farming: Pollution."). Commercial fishing practices result in the loss of large quantities of marine life considered 'bycatch' and not suitable for human consumption ("Bycatch."). Humans

[6] Proponents and opponents of oil sands differ in their methods of measuring CO_2 emissions from the extraction process. Proponents typically measure from 'well to wheel', a measurement that includes the combustion of the fuel. Opponents typically measure from 'well to pump', including only the extraction process. Emissions from combustion are equal regardless of extraction technique; adding them to comparison measurements serves only to flatten the delta between them. Well-to-wheel measurements show that CO_2 emissions from tar sands extraction are 15-35% higher than those for traditional oil extraction. Well-to-pump measurements show a three-to-four fold increase in CO_2 emissions from tar sand extraction over traditional oil extraction (Mech 16).

have adopted a wide array of activities that support themselves to the detriment of other species, contributing to the environmental crises I refer to throughout this paper.

Research Methodology

Much of my research is based on a literature review and the subsequent synthesis of my findings. I began by looking at how societies, communities and groups with varying religious beliefs relate to the natural environment. My initial assumption was that practitioners of the more ancient religions have a stronger sense of interconnection with the natural world as well as a greater sense of the presence of the divine in nature, and that this understanding would lead to more benign environmental practices. In order to place these socio-religious groups into context, both culturally and chronologically, I relied heavily on the work of Bruce Lerro, a psychologist who delves into humanity's diverse relationships with its deities within these groups. This not only allowed me to better understand the sanctity of nature as perceived by various socio-religious groups, but also how the desacralisation of nature has emerged in our primarily Christian Western society. Lerro does not formally address the connection between religious belief systems and environmental praxis, however I use his work as my springboard into the subject, adding examples of the various societal structures he identifies and relying on other sources to provide the link to environmentalism. While not all of it is documented here, this portion of my research took me on a multi-millennial tour of humanity around the globe. From this point forward, I left Lerro behind and focussed my research on the Western world based on its relevance and familiarity to my lived experience. This led me to explore the secularisation process in Europe through the Scientific Revolution and Reformation, and how these events shaped the New World.

Once I had established a better understanding of the desacralisation of nature, I turned to the process of resacralising nature. In order to understand how the resacralisation of nature might contribute to positive environmental action, I first needed to explore the religious and

spiritual movements at play, and to gain a better appreciation for their stance on environmental praxis. Once again I looked to the literature to enlighten me on how adherents of both traditional religions and emerging spiritualities interact with their natural environment.

In order to explore the beliefs and behaviours practiced by adherents of emerging spiritual movements, I supplemented my literature review with interviews with residents of the village of Wakefield, Quebec, a growing rural community that attracts people of all ages who choose to embrace environmentally sustainable lifestyles. These choices, and the associated ways of living, are often based on a wide variety of spiritual or religious foundations.

An English-speaking community located about half-an-hour's drive from Ottawa, Wakefield sits between the Gatineau River and the Gatineau Park. Together these two natural environments offer virtually unlimited outdoor activities during all seasons: swimming, boating, skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, camping, caving and even bungee jumping. Residents are able to procure almost everything they need locally, including locally produced organic produce, meat, eggs, honey, maple syrup, soaps and wool. While many residents find their livelihood in the city, they are all engaged with their community on some level and choose to spend their leisure time in this rural environment. It is home to intellectuals, civil servants, labourers, farmers and an abundance of artists.

I was inspired to conduct my research in this community based on the prevalence of adherents of emerging spiritualities, my perception of their relationships to the natural environment and their willingness to share their beliefs. The interviews allowed me to delve deeper into the spiritual-environmental relationships of adherents from both traditional religions and emerging spiritual movements. Participants shared very personal details of their beliefs, their understanding of the human/nature relationship, their environmental praxis and their views on a resacralised natural environment.

I conducted 15 interviews with people who were either known to me or who responded to a short post I placed in the local online newsletter. I began each interview with the same

script, ensuring that each participant was asked the same series of questions. However, the participants digressed at times into unscripted topics. The interview format and script is included in Appendix A. The interviews typically lasted between 30-60 minutes, with a couple running to 90 minutes. I did relatively little to stem the flow of responses, short of steering the participants back to relevant subject matter.

Document Outline

My paper begins by looking backwards into humanity's past in an effort to better understand the roots of Western society's stance on environmental issues, and how religion has contributed to the shaping of that position. Section One looks at how humanity's various religions have influenced our relationship with the natural environment both from a historical and cultural perspective. I focus mainly on Bruce Lerro's book *From Earth Spirits to Sky Gods: the Socio-ecological Origins of Monotheism, Individualism and Hyper-Abstract Reasoning,* which provides his understanding of humanity's relationships with its deities and how these relationships are shaped by various ecological, technological and economic factors. This work illuminated those factors that influence the human/nature relationship when viewed in the context of religious praxis. Using Lerro's nomenclature, I look at two societal structures: hunter/gatherers and empire builders. In addition, I explore two important influencers to humanity's development: the rise of agriculture and the advent of the sky gods. In each of these sub-sections, I visit the homes of the gods, following their migration from the natural environment to a supernatural heaven.

Hunter/gatherers represent the oldest of humanity's societal structures and therefore provide the starting point for my inquiry into the human/nature relationship of ancient cultures. I look to Australia's Aboriginal people as an example of a hunter/gatherer society, drawing from the works of Deborah Bird Rose, an anthropologist who has spent decades exploring philosophical ecology among the Aboriginal people, as well as Kenneth Maddock, an

anthropologist specialising in Australian Aboriginals, to provide significant insight into their ways of being. In addition, I consult J. L. Kohan whose area of expertise lies with Aboriginal environmental impacts. Through these resources I gain insight into the intersection of Aboriginal spirituality and environmental praxis.

In my opinion, the onset of agriculture, and more specifically the invention of the plough, represents the most significant turning point in human history. Again leaning on Lerro, I look at how these events shaped humanity's societal structure and its relationship with the natural world.

With agriculture came the shift from a nomadic to settled life, greater territorialism and empire building. Lerro's background in psychology plays a significant role in his evaluation of this societal structure as he examines the shift to abstract ways of thinking that not only contribute to a more hierarchical societal structure, but also to increasingly transcendent deities. The Inca of Peru provide an excellent example of an empire-building, agrarian society who were transitioning from earth-based to sky-based deities. My exploration of the Incan religion is informed by a manuscript written by Blas Valera, a 16th century Jesuit missionary living among the Inca in Peru shortly after the fall of their empire. J. Donald Hughes, an environmental historian, provides much of the information on the Incas' relationship with the natural environment. Once again, I'm able to show how religious/spiritual belief systems influence environmental praxis, and how this changes based on societal structure.

Another significant turning point for humanity came with the onset of a truly transcendent god. In this sub-section, I synthesise a great amount of Lerro's work into a short overview of the process that saw the gods moving to the heavens. I use Christianity as an example of a religion with a transcendent god, focussing on the more negative impacts that the religion has had on environmental praxis. I draw on Lynn White Jr. and Bishop John Shelby Spong, who both, in their own eras, opened up conversations about Christianity's environmental impact, as well as David Kinsley's choices for the most environmentally-damaging Bible passages. I close with a

look at the more sinister aspects of Christianity's environmental stance, as depicted by Karen Hendricks in her book *Divine Destruction*.

From this point forward, I focus my research on the Western world, which is influenced primarily by Christianity. I look at the secularisation process particularly as it pertains to the scientific revolution in Europe, which significantly affected experiences in the New World. I rely on the work of Keith Thomas, who explores in great detail the interactions between humanity and the various elements of the natural world in England as the scientific revolution unfolded. I also provide a few insights regarding the significance of the Protestant Reformation on Western spiritual thought, as provided by Bronislaw Szerszynski.

I close out Section One with a look at sacred spaces. The evolution of places deemed sacred by humanity, from natural elements to built spaces, provides a mirror within which one can see the reflection of humanity's changing spiritual stance regarding the natural environment. I draw on the work regarding the evolution of India's sacred groves by J. Donald Hughes and M. Chandran to illustrate this transition.

This brief overview illuminates Western society's arrival at its current spiritual and environmental situation, that of a society founded on Christianity but whose religiosity is in decline, and whose treatment of the natural environment is becoming increasingly destructive. It raises serious questions about how we can move forward from this position while alleviating our environmental crisis.

In Section Two I turn to the future to explore how changing trends within the traditional religions, as well as new forces within emerging spiritual movements, attempt to address these questions. I take a fresh look at Christianity, endeavouring to highlight those sects under its vast umbrella that find within its sacred texts a message of positive environmentalism. My references in this section are varied, as I sought to explore Christianity's positive environmental influences from many quarters. I looked at early American Christian advocates for

environmental action (e.g. John Muir, Thomas Berry) as well as their contemporary counterparts (e.g. Matthew Fox, Pope Francis).

I have chosen to group the emerging spiritualties into the categories of Neo-Pagan and Nature-Based Spiritualties. In fact the wide array of movements that presented themselves for consideration defied any kind of solid systematic classification: the categories I assembled are based on my own logic. In the sub-section on Neo-Paganism, I rely on the works of Rountree, Luhrmann and Wallace for a more generalised look into this group of movements (all of whom acknowledge the diversity within it), as well as Starhawk and Cooper for their more specialised areas of expertise regarding Wicca and Druidry respectively. Cooper's work sheds some light on those factors that motivated adherents to leave the religions of their upbringing and turn to Druidry. The sub-section on Nature-Based Spiritualties draws almost exclusively on the works of Bron Taylor, who has written extensively about these movements and their influence on environmentalism. As the category's name suggests, these spiritual movements are deeply rooted in the natural environment and play a significant role in the resacralisation of nature. I conclude the sub-section on Nature-Based Spiritualties with a look at the New Age. Another somewhat nebulous area, New Age comprises any number of belief systems, most of them highly personal and often cobbled together from aspects of other religious or spiritual ideologies. This section is informed by the works of Chryssides, Albanese and Prince and Riches, which provide insight into New Age spirituality and beliefs. I mine these works for information specific to the intersection of these beliefs and environmental praxis. Finally, I look to Annick Hedlund-de-Witt for a critical view of the positive and negative aspects of New Age environmental action.

Throughout Section Two I examine how these various belief systems are being applied to environmental stewardship, activism and lifestyle. Further, I endeavour to understand whether these religions/spiritual movements have the necessary power to effect, or at least influence, significant change in the environmental arena.

Section Three provides an in-depth account of the interviews conducted with my research participants. These interviews identified those beliefs, practices and trends that were common among the participants, while concurrently highlighting the uniqueness of each person. In this paper I focus on the commonalities, using the voices of the participants to bring the subject matter to life. In order to lay the foundation for our discussion, I began by delving into how the participants identify spiritually, tracing their paths from the religious/spiritual influences of their upbringing to the movement or institution where they currently find their spiritual home. I then explored their relationship with the natural world as seen through the lens of their spiritual identity, and how it translates into their environmental practices. We discussed the importance of proximity to nature in the development of these relationships and how the absence of it can lead to a fear of the wilderness.

As I turn the discussion to the sacralisation of nature, I find myself facing a new perspective that has forced me to reconsider my position. The respect and care for nature that I attributed to humanity's perception of the sanctity of nature, can in fact be achieved outside of a spiritual framework. It appears to be the result of an ontology that is shared by all the participants, regardless of religious/spiritual identity or indeed the presence of any spiritual framework at all. While it is outside the scope of this paper to delve deeply into the subject of this shared ontological shift, I look briefly for potential explanations in E.O. Wilson's biophilia hypothesis as well as the theory held by many New Agers (I cite Gregg Braden) that quantum theory is only now starting to unlock ancient mysteries of human understanding.

I conclude Section Three with a view to the future, inviting my interviewees to share their vision of our natural environment over the next 50-100 years. Many of them believe that we are in a period of great transition; it is a difficult time, but one that will pave the way for a much brighter future. I find within the works of Tucker and Swimme, as well as Vaughan-Lee, a similar conclusion.

I present my conclusions in Section Four. I describe how both traditional religions and emerging spiritual movements have important and complementary roles to play in environmentalism. Humanity looks to the more structured religions to provide guidance and leadership, often through interpretation of sacred scripture. Adherents of the emerging spiritual movements tend to follow more personal spiritual agendas, practicing unique and individual environmental action. I note the place for the resacralisation of nature in environmentalism, while acknowledging that it represents only one facet of a broader ontology. This way of knowing the world and understanding our place within the rest of nature, is, in my opinion, crucial to the preservation of our planet, and may be experienced in both religious/spiritual and secular frameworks. This ontology can be encouraged through increased exposure to nature: humanity must step outside its human constructs to forge a deeper relationship with the natural world.

SECTION ONE: LOOKING BACK

Evolution of Religion

In his book *From Earth Spirits to Sky Gods: the Socio-ecological Origins of Monotheism, Individualism and Hyper-Abstract Reasoning*, Bruce Lerro posits that the infrastructure and structure of any given society determine which type of religious system will prevail within that society, suggesting that belief systems are typically the last element of a society to change and do so to legitimize ecological, demographic, technological, economic and political situations. Throughout our history, and as evidenced in contemporary life, humanity has adopted various societal structures: hunter/gatherer, horticulture, agriculture, herding/horticulture, farming/commerce and industrial. In response to the changes inherent in the transition from one structure to another, sacred systems were forced to adapt in order to stay in line with society's spiritual needs (Lerro 291). The following sub-sections look briefly at a sampling of Lerro's societal models and provide examples of how their religious beliefs affected their relationships with the natural world.

Hunter/Gatherer Societies

In hunter/gatherer societies, the earliest and most primitive of humanity's societal organisations, we see what is perhaps the closest spiritual bond that humans have ever shared with their natural environment. Among hunter/gatherers, individuals and society in general are informed by a multitude of immanent sacred entities. An absence of church and religious figures in these societies provides the context for direct connection between individuals and the deities, promoting a religious experience that is both experiential and highly personal. Ritual is an important means by which to control the deities, and by extension, the natural environment where they dwell (Lerro 38-67).

In hunter/gatherer societies, religion is based on the relationships between family members as well as with elements of nature; all exchanges between clan members are therefore also exchanges of energy between elements of nature. The individual's feelings, imagination and dreams are understood not to originate with them but rather to come to them from nature. As such, all of these elements of the human psyche and individuality are influenced by its elements such as the weather or the wind. Exchanges such as those of food, land, goods or talismans are coupled with customs and taboos that are part of the greater cosmos and infused with sanctity: this type of society inherently cannot support commercial activity that is devoid of sacred meaning and connection (Lerro 83).

Early societies such as that of the hunter/gatherer are marked by a collectivist self that is interdependent with society and nature. The roles that people play and the way they interact with others define their personality, while their fate lies squarely within the hands of the deities. This intense and pervasive relationship with the nature-based deities underpins the use of ritual as a means to alter elements of the natural world (Lerro 125, 207).

Australian Aboriginal Society

A prime example of a hunter/gatherer religious system is found among the Aboriginal people of Australia. My research has led me to understand that Australian Aboriginal belief systems and their relationship with their natural environment are so closely intertwined as to be virtually inseparable. Deborah Bird Rose asserts that the Australia's Aboriginal people do not believe humans—or any other species—to be at the centre of creation, nor do they believe in a hierarchy of life. Rather, all elements of creation are sentient and are connected through a network of relationships. The world is a self-regulating system under one law, and each component of it is a system unto itself. These autonomous units are "cross-cut" by others forming an endless series of relationships, crossing not only human lines but also totemic and

natural ones in a network of space, time and entities (Rose "Life and Land" 205-208; Rose "Sacred Site" 104).

The Aboriginals' creation myth is one that is intimately tied to the natural environment: they believe that the world was shaped during a period known as the *Dreamtime* or the *Dreaming* by powers who had previously been in a dormant state, but who became active for the creation process. These powers walked, slithered and flew across the empty land in intersecting paths, leaving behind them the natural features of the landscape. They also established relationships, put into motion the cycles of life and gave the people their culture and way of living (Maddock 85). The concept of the Dreaming is a complex one, not only referring to a specific time, but also the source of life and a way of living. It represents the past, the present and the always. "To be brought into full realization of the Dreamtime is to share actively in that stream of life and power which is not hampered by the limitations of space and time" (Elkin 4).

The transcendental and totemic powers that were present during the Dreaming are connected to humanity in the same way that humans are connected to each other, however the transcendental powers share a universal relationship with all humans, while the totems are closely associated with a specific clan and at times, an individual. The latter typically take on the shape of an animal that is abundant in the clan's region, finding their home near a water source in the clan's hunting grounds. These places are sacred sites and are the source of life and power for those who share the totem. The manifestation of the sacred in natural elements allows for regular communication between humanity and the powers. The powers appear to the people through the guise of their natural manifestation and in return the Aboriginal people perform ceremonies and rituals to maintain their connection to their totems and their law (Maddock 87-93). These ceremonies are performed for various reasons—to celebrate a rite of passage, ensure an ample food supply or mark a death—and involve singing and dancing which connect the human participants to the powers and also the land.

In addition to ceremonies marking life events, Aboriginal life is underscored by 'magic' used in both benevolent and malevolent ways. Commonly known for his medical practices, the Aboriginal shaman exhibits many characteristics that are rarely ascribed to mortals outside of the most primitive societies. He is able to communicate with other people over long distances simply by using his powers of thought, see what is happening in other locations either by flying through space or by sending his totem out to observe on his behalf, and can transcend time and space as is evidenced in his ability to disappear and then reappear somewhere else (Elkin 40-55). In order to manipulate time and space, these men, and Aboriginal people in general, must share a strong understanding of and connection to, the natural and supernatural worlds.

The Aboriginal people belong to a world that "links species, places and regions and leaves no region, place, species or individual standing outside creation, life processes and responsibilities" (Rose "Sacred Site" 105). The paths of their ancestors define the sacred geography of the land and provide the foundation for their very culture, the way that life must be lived. Nature has no overseer; it follows its own rhythms and can be understood only through the experience of living within it. As much of this environmental knowledge is localised, Aboriginal people choose to stay close to their place of origin where they are near to not only the source of their totem-power, but the natural systems that sustain them. Just as they are inherent in their country, their country is also inherent in them (Rose "Life and Land" 212; Rose "Sacred Site" 108).

How then does this relationship translate into environmental stewardship or management? Rose suggests that the Aboriginal people practice three types of environmental care: practices of memory and learning that are passed down through the generations, practices to ensure that resources are not overused, and care of the habitat (Rose "Sacred Site" 108). She believes that Aboriginal people have been successful in these efforts and are responsible for "maintaining the open grasslands that covered much of the continent, for the preservation of specific stands of fire-sensitive vegetation...for the protection of refugia including breeding

sanctuaries and the preservation of sources of permanent water in arid environments" (Rose "Sacred Site" 102).

In fact Aboriginals had been living in Australia for tens of thousands of years before recorded history, rendering it very difficult to ascribe specific environmental gains or losses to them alone. The Aboriginals never adopted agriculture, however there is evidence of them altering the land to facilitate fishing by digging channels for capturing eels or creating fish traps in rivers. As a gathering society, they were ever-aware of resource management and ensured the sustainability of their vegetable diet. This diet largely comprised roots and tubers, the latter never being culled without planting a portion in the ground for regeneration. The Aboriginals have long used fire to clear out undergrowth, create new growth and manage the composition of forests. These burnings also altered the population of the animals, allowing the proliferation of desired species (e.g. kangaroos) or their prey. While this practice was initially considered problematic by early Western witnesses, it has since been deemed beneficial to the environment and is used by Australian authorities in protected areas (Kohen 40-113).

As much as the Aboriginal people appeared to have been good stewards of their land before contact, there is reason to question if this would have remained the case. The growing Aboriginal population recorded at the time of contact may have demanded new methods of food production which could have significantly eroded the Aboriginals' benign impact on nature (Kohen 136).

As has been demonstrated here, hunter/gatherer societies typically share an extremely close spiritual relationship with their natural environment, and understand this relationship to be symbiotic. They believe that elements of the natural world—and indeed the entire cosmos—are not only physically, but spiritually, nurturing to their lives. Their efforts at conservation and sustainability therefore serve the purpose of feeding this relationship and ensuring that their physical and spiritual needs will be met into the future.

The Onset of Agriculture

The advent of agricultural society is most often identified with the Fertile Crescent in Mesopotamia and Egypt, however we now know that it emerged relatively concurrently in three other areas as well: China, Central America and South America (Wright 42). I echo Ronald Wright's assessment that "in the magnitude of its consequences, no other invention rivals farming" (45). Lerro explores in detail the profound impacts that the advent of agriculture brought to bear on human society, such as settlement, the introduction of the plough and social stratification. The invention of the plough and the onset of agrarian society meant that populations outgrew the more primitive social structures: chiefdoms grew into larger empires and new economies were created. Giving up a nomadic life that relied entirely on what was readily available in the natural environment, invoking a process that spanned millennia, people settled into villages and towns, cultivating the land and domesticating animals. Societies were able to produce more than they could consume leading to trade, currency and the development of economic markets. The ancient immanent spirits dwelling in nature and throughout society could not support the calculation and efficiency necessary for improved production. Societies therefore needed a transcendent deity who would not stand in the way of production, or need to be appeased as increasing amounts of resources were exploited (Lerro 58).

One of the most significant changes in agrarian societies beginning around the time of the Axial Age, is the emergence of the individualist self. This self understands that it is responsible for its own fate: it severs its relationships with society and nature and then recreates new ones that are voluntary and contractual. Unlike the collectivist self that was intimately tied to the natural environment and the deities that inhabited it, the individualistic self seeks to dominate nature rather than to mimic it (Lerro 125).

In agricultural societies, we see the space outside of civilisation—nature and other societies—as being wilderness. Over time and as empires grow, this wilderness has to be tamed and other societies subdued and claimed in the name of the sky-god. The concept of

sacred space no longer refers to the natural environment at large, but rather becomes more specific and in many cases marked by built shrines or temples. In sharp contrast to the hunter/gatherer societies, the deity is placeless and society loses its attachment to place, looking to expand ever farther into foreign territory. The advent of literacy exacerbates the disconnection with place, as oral traditions were largely dependent on elements of the natural world in which to situate their myths (Lerro 100-101).

Empire Building

Lerro sees another profound shift in humanity's development as settlement and the over-abundance of food created an environment where the focus could shift from simple subsistence to the desire for power. Centralised society and empire building are defined by abstract thinking as they require much more planning and sophistication than does simply raiding a neighbouring village for not only does the empire builder have to expand into foreign lands, but they must incorporate the conquered people into their own unified society. This abstract way of thinking then translates from the secular world to the sacred: as the political structure becomes more stratified and hierarchical, the sacred powers become less immanent and more transcendent. The religious system that typically arises in empires is presided over by a single abstract deity. This deity lives in the heavens and cannot be influenced by sensory or earthly ritual, rather it is reached through more intellectual practices such as prayer or mediation. It is in societies such as these that we see the development of state markets, commodity production and the use of money (Lerro 39-73)

In empire-building societies, the psyche is compartmentalised and cut off from the natural world as is manifested in the individual's perceived inability to influence or effect change on the natural world; the best that they can hope for is divine intervention in these events as it is swayed by their prayers. However, in the more stratified agrarian societies people had greater control over nature than they did over their social relations. They had tools such as ploughs and

irrigation ditches to subdue the land, and they could harness the strength of animals. At the same time, they were largely powerless to effect economic or political change and were subject to state-determined standards of living (Lerro 150-151).

Turning to the labour force in the development of societies, we see a significant change in how work is perceived and effected. In tribal societies there is no separation between mental and manual labour: all work is perceived and executed by everyone. Because the mind is not seen as an intermediary between the inner experience and the natural world, these two phenomena become fused: consciousness and the natural world are inseparable. Thinking and activity are one; manual labour is executed by everyone. In agricultural societies this changes as the upper castes become responsible for planning, strategising and other forms of mental labour, while the lower castes execute the manual labour. Over time, the upper castes begin to project their abstract form of thinking on the deities: the sacred world becomes a reflection of the administrative function of the elite classes. As the upper classes became more settled in their administrative positions of control over the labour cycle, they come to view manual labour with contempt. Similarly, the appearance of priests and priestesses in the agricultural societies mark the withdrawal of the deities from the material world and the loss of their physical and biological attributes. These priests and priestesses then become the intermediaries between the deities and humanity, creating increased distance between the gods and the natural world (Lerro 288-290).

The Inca

The Inca of Peru provide an example of an empire-building, agrarian society that was transitioning from their hunter/gather roots to a more hierarchical structure. While they still paid lip service to their earth-bound deities, their sky-gods dominated the pantheon. At the heart of their creation myth lies a group of siblings—four brothers and four sisters—who emerged from the earth on the Island of the Sun located in Lake Titicaca, and who travelled across the land

creating various elements of the landscape before settling in the Cusco valley where the Inca capital was established and still sits. Christie, who has studied the Inca and Mayan people extensively, asserts that through the use of their creation myth, the Inca assigned themselves a position of privilege and legitimised their subsequent conquest of the lands named in the creation myth (Christie 46).

Paul R. Steele, an art historian specialising in the Inca, and Catherine Allen, an anthropologist, blend their disciplines to provide a shared understanding of the various aspects of Incan mythology. The Incan pantheon, like that of most hunter-gatherer societies, was vast and included a hierarchy of deities and spirits that lived throughout the Inca's three-tiered universe: *Hunan Pacha* (sky), *Ukhu Pacha* (inner earth) and *Cay Pacha* (human world on the surface of the earth) (Steele and Allen 19). Of greatest significance were the gods associated with the sun, moon and thunder. Inti, the sun-god had a sacred link to Inca royalty and was married to Mama Quilla, the moon-goddess. The thunder-god, Illapa, was particularly important as he drew rain from the celestial river of the Milky Way to nourish the crops on earth (Valera 8). In these deities we see the beginning of the transition to sky-gods: they are still part of the cosmos but have moved away from the proximate environment.

The Incas believed in an animating force variously called *mauen*, *camac*, *upani* and *amaya.* This vital force infused all material things including elements of the landscape, elements of nature and manmade items such as textiles, implying a certain level of equality among all things. There was therefore a reciprocity in all relationships; a give-and-take of both positive and negative aspects of interaction that permeated Incan life (Steele and Allen 25). Blas Valera was born to a Spanish father and Peruvian mother shortly after the fall of the Incan empire. Fluent in Quechua, he wrote extensively about the Inca in an effort to preserve an account of their history and culture. He suggests that the connection of spiritual life to the land can be seen most readily in the system of *huacas* found throughout the Incan region. *Huacas* were manifestations of the divine or spirit world and were found at water sources, interesting land

formations, roads or simply line-of-sight to another sacred or interesting feature of the landscape. In return for offerings and sacrifices, the *huacas* provided vitality and identity to humans (Valera 9).

Just as there was a hierarchy of gods and spirits, so too was there a significant organisation of priests within the Incan empire. They held a wide range of positions that came with varying degrees of power from the *Vilahoma* (the pope-like head of the "church") to simple temple caretakers. Of particular interest are the *huatuc*, or diviners, who read omens in such sources as bird entrails, bird flight patterns and thrown tokens, and received the oracle at temples (Valera 68).

In examining how the Inca relate to their environment, we must remember that they placed themselves in a position of superiority over nature. They used nature to the benefit of society in a way that was both sustainable and manageable. With each new conquest, the Incas appropriated land, crops and livestock for dispersal among the nobility and the population. The products of the fields throughout the empire were managed in such a way that the most vulnerable were fed first and the crops belonging to the nobility and the Sun were placed in storage for shared use. Through the use of their elaborate system of roads, the state could move surplus food throughout the empire as required.

I look to J. Donald Hughes, an environmental historian, for his views on the Inca's treatment of the natural environment. As the Incan empire expanded to more than 30 million people, conservation and sustainability practices were implemented to ensure adequate food and fuel for the citizens. Pollen records suggest that agriculture has existed in the Andes to the detriment of forests for 4000 years, rendering the Incan territory largely devoid of woodlands by the time the empire began its expansion. Because the forests were state property, they were able to be managed both prudently and efficiently. While it is assumed that these cultivated forests were intended to provide a renewable resource for fuel and building material, they may also have served to stabilise the eroding mountain soils (Hughes 74).

Other sustainability practices involved the protection of wildlife for various purposes within Incan society. Birds and their habitats, which were important as sources of fertiliser, were strictly protected: penalties for killing birds or encroaching on the islands during breeding seasons could be as severe as death (Hughes 72). Vicuna and guanaco (both wild relatives of the llama) were prized for their hair/wool and deer provided meat and hides. Hunting these animals outside of ceremonial activities—which occurred in rotated territories to allow regeneration—was also strictly prohibited (Hughes 74-75).

The Inca clearly used conservation and sustainability practices in their relationship with nature. However, it appears that these practices had little or nothing to do with their religion or spiritual connection to their environment: they were purely a means to ensure that the population of the ever-expanding empire was fed. In the Inca we see a society whose gods occupied a hierarchical structure that had them dwelling among all elements of the cosmos from the heavens to the earth. But those gods found in the rocks and streams were already losing their power—with the creation of the empire came the erosion of nature's sacredness.

The Advent of Sky Gods

As discussed above, many elements of human development such as the onset of agriculture, the development of commerce and currency, the spread of literacy and the formation of hierarchical societies were instrumental in preparing humanity for the type of abstract thinking required to place their faith in a god who lived outside of the immediate realm of nature. These changes occurred over many millennia and provided the backdrop to a progression of gods that gradually migrated from the immanent to the transcendent. I turn one final time to Lerro, who traces this progression using humanity's creation myths and other divine stories as they mirror humanity's psycho-societal changes.

We see an example of the evolution of deities at work in a series of attacks by Indo-Europeans, Indo-Iranians and Aryans on European and Middle Eastern horticulturist societies

between the 5th and 3rd millennia BCE. The attackers were monotheistic pastoralists who over generations were able to mould simple small communities into stratified societies with conquering chiefs at their head. In order for this societal structure to be effective, the mythology of the goddess-worshipping horticultural societies would have to transition to one that allowed a conqueror to reign. The creation stories that followed progressed along a similar trajectory: from a world created by a goddess to one created by a male consort, a warrior god and finally to a single male god without any female goddess participation or intervention (Lerro 231-233).

In the Axial Age the power of myth as an essential element of the sacred systems declined with the rise of philosophy and the great religions. Prior to the Axial Age, there was no separation of the individual, nature and society. Sacred entities moved freely among humanity and nature—they were present in ritual as well as in everyday events. There was no distinction between the sacred and the secular, between appearance and reality. Then, with the advent of writing, ideas could be separated from the sensual mundane world. Thinking took on a life of its own, allowing introspection and subjective description of the world, and giving rise to philosophy and the great religions, both of which share a "belief that there is something fundamentally flawed with the way things appear" (Lerro 270-271). With this belief came a desire to change the world and the mind through spiritual transcendence or hyperabstraction. The individual, segregated from nature, saw the world as both secular and sacred. People challenged their perceptions, acknowledged illusion, and searched for the true essence of things. The secular world gained prominence as philosophy and science attempted to define it; meanwhile the sacred world retreated into a more distant and transcendental dimension. The growth of commerce and other interactions that were devoid of magic ceremony and organic relationships were incompatible with the previous mythological framework. The process of secularisation and demythologising of society served to shift the dwelling places of the deities outside of nature to mountain tops, the heavens and ultimately total transcendence. The erosion of mythology was also influenced by the structure of society itself, as it grew from small kinship-based

communities to large urban centres with no blood connections among its population (Lerro 270-272).

Looking at the major protagonists in mythology, human society and sacred circles, we can trace attributes that underpin all of these characters. In the archaic societies, the individuals who broke ranks and rose in power were warriors; their sacred counterparts were heroes. In the Axial Age societies, these individuals were priests or scholars, their sacred counterparts were sages. When examining the gods of the Archaic and Axial Ages, we see a similar set of characteristics to those displayed by the heroes and sages of these ages. In the Archaic Age, we find heroes with no inner sense of morality. Laws, such as Moses' commandments, were external and provided the moral compass by which heroes were guided. The warrior-hero demanded obedience from his subject just as his deity demanded obedience from him. We see in Yahweh an example of a deity who gained submission through fire and brimstone. Later, in the Axial Age, the moral compass became internalised, at which time Yahweh became a kinder, gentler god. This evolution appears almost as an aging process: the archaic gods seem adolescent and tempestuous while those from the Axial Age seem mature and loving (Lerro 275-280).

This brief history of the evolution of humanity's deities allows us to better understand how various societies come to worship in such different ways, and how these differences affect treatment of the natural environment. I close this section with a look at Christianity—and its position on the human/nature relationship—as an example of a society presided over by a sky-god.

Christianity

In his book *Sins of the Scripture*, Episcopalian Bishop John Spong explores Bible passages used—incorrectly, in his view—by Christians to support activities and attitudes that he sees as undesirable. Within this collection he looks at the roots of a Christian anti-

environmental stance, based on the emergence of a transcendent god. The Bible tells us that in the middle of the 13th century BCE, the Hebrews wandered in the desert for forty years after their enslavement in Egypt. During this time, their monotheistic god grew in strength and ruled all that was on earth, even though he lived in the heavens. The Hebrews invaded Canaan, an agricultural society ruled by Astarte, a fertility goddess, and her consort Baal. The Hebrews' victory over Canaan represented a victory of the heavenly god over the earthly deities. "These people then built into the heart of their religion...a denigration of the sacredness of the earth that was destined to become an operative assumption in their understanding of life" (Spong 55-56).

Many scholars have come to similar conclusions. David Kinsley taught religious studies at McMaster University and specialised in the history of religion. He suggests that the negative attitude toward the Baal cult in the Bible is seen by environmentalists as a "criticism of a religious view that emphasises rapport with, reverence for, and propitiation of the powers latent in the land—in short, a criticism of nature religion" (Kinsley 106). Lynn White Jr., professor of medieval history at Harvard and Stanford, opened up the debate regarding Christianity's role in environmentalism in the 1960s. In his seminal article *The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis*, White proposes that "the victory of Christianity over paganism was the greatest psychic revolution in the history of our culture" (White 1205). He describes the belief system of antiquity as one where many elements of the natural world—trees, mountains, streams etc.—had a guardian spirit that required placating if their dwelling was being disturbed. When Christianity destroyed paganism, it made it possible for Christians to treat nature with detachment and indifference (1205).

The Christian creation myth—wherein the dominion of humanity over the rest of the natural world is decreed—is often cited as the foundation for an unfavourable environmental stance (Kinsley 103). This anthropocentrism is supported by three key passages in the Old Testament:

> Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image and likeness to rule the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all wild animals on earth, and all reptiles that crawl upon the earth'. So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, and every living thing that moves upon the earth. (The New English Bible, Gen. 1.26-29)
>
> God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase, and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall fall upon all wild animals on earth, on all birds of heaven, on everything that moves upon the ground and all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. Every creature that lives and moves shall be food for you; I give them you all, as once I gave you all green plants. (The New English Bible, Gen. 9.1-3)
>
> Yet thou hast made him little less than a god, crowning him with glory and honour. Thou makest him master over all thy creatures; thou hast put everything under his feet: all sheep and oxen, all the wild bests, the birds in the air and the fish in the sea, and all that moves along the paths of the ocean. (The New English Bible, Psalms 8.5-8)

These passages all define the relationship that humanity shares with the rest of the natural world according to God's plan. This position of dominion and its significant impacts on humanity's treatment of the natural environment will be discussed in further detail in the section on secularisation and the scientific revolution.

A further Christian tenet that contributes to a lack of respect for the natural environment is found within the scripture and doctrine that is focussed on spiritual salvation and the associated transcendence from humanity's earthly identity. Life on earth then, is merely a stepping stone to eternal life beyond its limited borders. To the present day, Christianity continues to embrace this anti-nature position, focussing rather on transcending this world and moving onto 'real life' beyond it in heaven (Kinsley 106, Spong 55-56).

Stephanie Hendricks, a journalist investigating environmental policy, uncovered what is perhaps the most alarming attitude maintained by fundamentalist Christians towards the environment: Reconstructionism. Their doctrine suggests that the second coming of Christ and the ensuing Rapture will not occur until such time as the earth is spent, or used up. “They may also believe, along with millions of other Christian fundamentalists, that environmental destruction is not only to be disregarded but actually welcomed—even hastened—as a sign of the coming Apocalypse” (Scherer as cited inHendricks 49). Many advocates for these extreme anti-environmentalist positions could be found in high-ranking positions of authority within the George W. Bush administration (1-131).

These references and Biblical passages were chosen to illustrate how the ascension of the gods from the realm of nature to the heavens has impacted humanity’s relationship with nature, and also to underline the most destructive of Christianity’s positions regarding the natural environment. To be fair, the Bible is a vast tome supporting innumerable—and often opposing—ideologies. Christianity’s environmentally-friendly facet will be discussed in more detail in the Section Two.

Secularisation

In this sub-section I focus exclusively on the secularisation of Christian Europe and its North American colonies. This is not intended to imply that secularisation has not occurred (or is not occurring) in different cultures, however I choose to focus on that area that is most familiar and, I believe, most relevant to the fate of the planet. In that vein, I focus primarily on how secularisation in the European West has impacted humanity’s relationship with the natural environment.

Much like the processes associated with the migration of the gods from earth to the heavens, the path of secularisation does not follow a simple and straight trajectory. In the early days of the Christianity in Europe, many of the archaic ways were still present: the Christian

church had not been entirely successful in its promotion of a single transcendent, benevolent God. Even among those who had adopted Christianity, nature was viewed as a divine creation. This included a belief in household and nature-bound spirits that continued through the first few centuries of the Christian era in Europe. The need for identification with the 'secondary religious world' in the Christian cosmos evolved first through the notion of a series of mediating beings connecting the individual with God, and later into the cult of the saints, whose intimacy with God was enjoyed vicariously by the people who befriended them. Throughout this transition, the sacred spaces that permeated the natural world fell out of favour as built spaces such as churches and basilicas became more commonly used for worship (Szerszynski 38).

The Renaissance and Scientific Revolution

The Renaissance era, in the middle of the last millennium, introduced new thinkers and brought significant change to Europe. Descartes posited that humans were made of mind and matter; the matter followed natural laws unless acted upon by the mind. This dualism did not extend to nature, which was replete with beings and things that consisted solely of matter. Cartesian dualism served to support the Christian position of humanity's dominion over nature and secured humanity's seat of superiority over the rest of creation. Keith Thomas, a historian at Oxford University, wrote in great detail about humanity's relationship with the natural environment as it unfolded during the scientific revolution. At the beginning of this era it was accepted that the world was created for humans, a position that was enthusiastically enforced from the pulpits across the continent. The Fall was responsible for the state of nature: the ferocity of wild animals, the misery of the domestic ones and the cursed ground itself could all be blamed on Adam's sin. The symbol of the beast was associated with Satan and religion was an attempt to curb that beast within us, to rise above it. Animals—and indeed all of nature—were designed with human needs in mind: their sole purpose was in the service of humanity. If animals could not provide food or labour, they were credited with providing entertainment

(monkeys) or a reason to maintain cleanliness (lice). Taming of the forests represented a triumph of civilisation—the only "good" forests were those cultivated for fuel and building material. During this time, animals were treated with brutality and deforestation helped to eliminate the wilds (Kinsley 11-112; Thomas 17-21).

With the onset of what would become known as the Scientific Revolution, humanity started making discoveries that challenged our place in the world. Copernicus, and Galileo after him, landed a blow on anthropocentrism by asserting that the sun, rather than the earth, was at the centre of the cosmos. The telescope opened up the skies, the microscope introduced humans to a new world of tiny beings "pursuing their existence in utter indifference to human concerns", explorers were finding new lands populated with new people, and geologists were discovering that the world existed long before people walked upon it. "The Fall of Man could no longer be held responsible for nature's physical characteristics; the earth and the species on it had not been created for the sake of humanity, but had a life and history independent of man" (Thomas 168). In an effort to look at nature through a less anthropocentric lens, early naturalists began finding new ways to classify elements of the natural world. The new methods, which were hierarchical and based on intrinsic structural characteristics, replaced those that were founded on human needs or aesthetics, and served to underline the inherent value in plants and animals. From this point onwards, nature would be studied for its own sake, not for how it could benefit human society (Thomas 51-69).

The boundaries between human and non-human animals were dissolving—indeed Linnaeus included humans among the animals in his classification system (a system that is still in use today). There was an increasing tendency to credit animals with reason, intelligence and language which led to softening sentiments about cruelty to animals. By the 18th century, these sensibilities were becoming more widespread and were supported by the church. It had stopped being a question of whether animals could reason or talk, but one of if they could feel. The campaign against cruelty to animals "grew out of the Christian tradition that man should

take care of God's creation. It was enhanced by the collapse of the old view that the world existed exclusively for humanity; and it was consolidated by a new emphasis on sensation and feeling as the true basis for a claim to moral consideration" (Thomas 180).

This new attitude was initially put into practice largely because the increase in industrialisation led to the reduced reliance on animals for labour. Kindness to animals extended only so far as to ensure it didn't interfere with human needs, however once the attitudes towards animals started to soften, the idea of killing them for food became suspect and vegetarianism found many converts for a time.

Similarly, softening attitudes towards plant life began to manifest only as a means to economic benefit. Trees were planted in support of ship-building but were later seen to add beauty and dignity to a scene. Walking among them became fashionable, as did having a long tree-line avenue leading to your home or a wood on your property. Likewise, flower gardening became established as a major characteristic of British life and carried with it a spiritual connection to Eden and Gethsemane.

By the turn of the 19th century, the air in large cities (most notably London) became horribly polluted, in large part due to the burning of coal. The appeal of the countryside grew out of a desire to escape from the blackened air of the city. Even for those who couldn't afford their own country home, it became a place to retreat to for a weekend's refreshment. The previous fear of uncultivated spaces gave way to an appreciation of wild, barren land as a source of spiritual renewal. This attitude had religious roots: all God's works served a purpose and to visit nature was to visit Eden before the Fall (Thomas 242-254). This attitude was more quickly adopted by the wealthy whose livelihood was not caught up in agriculture or the need to otherwise tame nature. These city dwellers were instrumental in the preservation of the wild spaces that had previously been destroyed out of fear and disgust. With an irony that is still present today, the preservation of the wilderness was funded by the very industries that were destroying it (Thomas 287).

As has been shown here, the secularisation process during this period in Europe's history actually led to improved environmental treatment. I believe this to be a unique situation due in large part to the anti-environmental stance of Christianity in its early years (as evidenced in the belief that all of nature was provided by God for human use). There were, however, more changes to come both in Europe and the New World.

The Reformation and Beyond

The Protestant Reformation served as a backdrop to much of what was described in the previous section, the effects of which were felt throughout Christendom. With the onset of the Reformation in the 16th century, neither Catholic nor Protestant theology concerned itself with nature as the focus turned towards humanity and its salvation. Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, believed that nature is intended by God to be the home of humanity. Night was created so that they could rest and the sun was given so that they could work. Luther was apt to see God's wrath rather than God's glory in nature—it was not something with which one communed (Johnson 7).

Bronislaw Szerszynski, a sociologist at Lancaster University in the UK, focusses his work on the relationships among humanity, technology and the natural environment. He argues that the Reformation marked a turning point in humanity's understanding of nature in scientific terms, due in large part to the newly-minted meaning of asceticism. Rather than representing a moral superiority over the masses, "asceticism became recast as a straightforward refusal of worldly pleasure in favour of purposive conduct within the world" (53). The same manifestation of holiness in worldly endeavours that underscored Weber's 'Protestant work ethic' and gave rise to industrial capitalism may also have promoted humanity's exploration of the scientific aspects of nature.

In the post-Reformation world, any of the spirits that had been lingering in nature were banished as nature took on a negative aspect. Nature had few theological lessons to teach,

encouraging a return to scripture for salvation. This attitude accompanied the Puritan settlers to the New World, where the wilderness was viewed with contempt and fear. For many, it became Satan's domain—the desert where they would be tested and seek spiritual purification (Szerszynski 54).

Over time, humanity's distance from nature grew. As the body of scientific knowledge grew, humanity stepped into role of 'maker', usurping God's power. We became capable of shaping nature, of reducing it to smaller and smaller elements in order to fashion it into new and useful things. The human is no longer "one who cooperates with matter as another creature with its own desires and goals; instead, he acts on it from outside, yet as one who knows it more intimately than it does itself, as if its creator" (Szerszynski 56).

In other parts of the world, the secularisation process has run a more linear path, providing visible evidence of its effects on humanity's relationship with the natural world. In the following section on sacred spaces, I offer India as an example of how secularisation has impacted the treatment of nature.

Sacred Spaces

In defining that which makes a place sacred, I looked to both a religious scholar, R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, as well as historical geographers Richard Jackson and Roger Henrie. The latter understand the sanctity of these places to be a human construct, in the same way as the deities who inhabit them are: "sacred space does not exist naturally, but is assigned sanctity as man defines, limits and characterises it through his culture, experience and goals" (Jackson and Henrie 94). Sacred spaces are often identified as such due to some extraordinary event that happened there or because they are associated with a significant religious person. Werblowsky describes sacred places as those "which confer blessing because the divine became manifest there in one way or another, in experiences or traditions of theophanies or hierophanies, in miracles, or in the lives of saintly men" (Werblowsky 11). Both of these definitions imply that

there is nothing inherently special about these places, rather that they achieve significance through their association with sacredness.

The fundamental ways of living and understanding define the sacred spaces associated with each cultural tradition. Environmental activist Gary Snyder suggests that people living in forests designate wild spaces as sacred; agriculturalists often choose cultivated sacred spaces (Snyder 79). We can therefore follow humanity's progression through its various societal structures by looking at those spaces which are considered sacred. By way of example, I turn to the work on the sacred groves of India by M. Chandran, an Indian ecologist, and J. Hughes, an environmental historian.

In the sacred groves of India we see the very process of the desacralisation of nature laid bare. These groves contain evidence of animal and cult worship from a time long before the Aryan migration brought Hinduism to the subcontinent. When these gods were later assimilated into the Hindu pantheon, the groves did not discriminate: worship and dedication of all kinds were accepted in their midst—even nature itself was revered within the grove. The groves, sometimes covering hundreds of acres, were protected from tree-felling and the fires that cleared the land for cultivation. Through the years they nurtured plant and animal species that were otherwise at risk, maintaining a biodiversity that was quickly being lost in non-protected forests throughout the country. Most sacred groves were centred around springs or rivers, observing the sanctity of water and playing a valuable role in water conservation. In addition, they were a source of fruit and herbs for the community (Chandran and Hughes 413-420).

In ancient times, worship was focussed on some natural formation within the grove such as a spring or a termite mound. Later, a carving or statue dedicated to a god was created within the grove, and later still small temples or shrines were built to enclose the sacred natural formations. As time marched by the groves fell into disrepair as larger temples were built and the groves were forgotten. In many cases the groves vanished altogether leaving only a sacred

tree in a temple yard, while the built space nearby became the new embodiment of sanctity. (Chandran and Hughes 421-424).

In ancient times, sacred spaces were in nature, of nature and intertwined with nature. With progress and technology came development; as society grew more and more civilised, so too did the sacred spaces. The first temples within the sacred groves of India appeared when Buddhism began to spread throughout the country in the third century BCE, shortly before the birth of Christ. As might be expected then, when we look for examples of sacred spaces in the West, we find only built places. The Abrahamic religions all choose to worship in churches, synagogues and mosques. In keeping with the perceived otherness of nature, the natural spaces that became significant as settings for religious events have subsequently been marked by shrines, temples or other built structures.

Conclusion of Section One

In this section I presented a brief synopsis of several factors that have contributed to the desacralisation of nature. In his book *The Embers and the Stars*, philosopher Erazim Kohák explores the relationship that humanity shares with nature particularly as viewed through a spiritual lens. Kohák believes that our perceived distance from nature is the result of our focus on intellectual pursuits, which in turn deadens us to our lived experience. There can be no doubt that God is present in nature, however we lose sight of the presence of God behind our mental artifacts—often deliberately—as we pursue other endeavours (Kohak 182-188).

I see this as a direct result of society's shift to hierarchical structures and the resulting abstract way of thinking that define empire-building. It was during this time in humanity's evolution that some members of society adopted administrative roles rather than working directly with nature. Over time a trend has emerged: as fewer and fewer people actually work with their hands in the dirt, their roles have become devalued in favour of those who push paper (or increasingly, bytes). This has had a devastating effect on how we view the natural world.

According to Kohák, our blindness to divine presence is a voluntary one that has become inevitable over time, but is not irreversible. If we choose to remove the built constructs that stand between us and the presence of God we may see the sacred spaces that are all around us, opening doorways to the divine (187-188).

SECTION TWO: LOOKING FORWARD

After completing the research that is summarised in the previous section, I inevitably found myself wondering what is in store for humanity and our home. It would seem that the desacralisation of nature is a fait accompli; that we are inexorably walking down a path towards the willful destruction of our planet with nary a god in sight to deter us. In this section, I challenge that assumption and look instead for an alternate path towards a natural environment that once again teems with deities, or is at least a manifestation of the divine that commands the respect and reverence of its human inhabitants.

The quintessential step toward achieving this goal is the acceptance that all life is interconnected. The imagery around this idea is varied. The Buddhists, for example, have Indra's net: a net with a jewel at each intersection that reflects all the other jewels, which in turn reflect all the other jewels. Paul Shepard suggests that we tend to see ourselves and other elements of nature as isolated sacs, however the truth is that the skin is more like the surface of a pond—not a barrier but a 'delicate interpenetrator' (as cited in Macy 110). References such as these to the interconnection of all life abound in the literature and frequented my interviews. It is a theme that will reappear throughout this section within discussions of emerging spiritual movements and even among those religions thought to be relentless in their hold on dualism.

Over the last couple of decades, there has been a growing voice promoting the role that religion can play in addressing the current environmental crisis unfolding across the planet. For

some, such as Joanna Macy, an environmental activist whose areas of study include Buddhism, systems theory and deep ecology, religion is an undisputed player in the environmental arena: "When you look at what is happening to our world—and it is hard to look at what is happening to our water, our air, our trees, our fellow species—it becomes clear that unless you have roots in a spiritual practice that holds life sacred and encourages joyful communion with all your fellow beings, facing the enormous challenges ahead becomes nearly impossible" (147). Rockefeller (as cited inSponsel 84) suggests a circular relationship between spirituality and environmentalism: "The environmental crisis cannot be addressed without coming to terms with the spiritual dimension of the problem and the spiritual problems of humanity cannot be worked out apart from a transformation of humanity's relations with nature". Brockleman concurs with this position: "getting our ecological bearings may first entail getting our spiritual bearings in life by finding our way back to our home in nature" (Brockelman 33). For Plotkin, a depth psychologist, humanity's spiritual connection to the natural world was severed centuries ago. We need to shift the focus from humanity's immediate needs to the world's needs; a world that is considered sacred with its own essence and purpose (Plotkin 191-192).

These arguments all represent personal sentiment, and while they may be driving forces in the authors' environmental activism, they are somewhat ineffective as advocates for a wholesale movement to spirituality-based environmentalism. In an effort to move beyond the personal, Brockleman, a professor of religion and philosophy, offers four reasons why the environment is a spiritual issue. First, he believes that religion is largely responsible for the environmental crisis facing us today, and it should therefore take responsibility for reversing the situation. Second, beginning in the 20th century, there has been a thrust towards the individual's significance being measured in terms of material wealth, which has led to spiritual collapse. There is therefore no longer a drive towards a greater good. Third, we need an ethical response to environmental problems: it can't come strictly from the scientific and social communities. Any ethical response "must rest, ultimately, on a spiritual vision that transforms

us…and permits us to experience it in a reverential way as intrinsically valuable" (39). Finally, he suggests that there is a hunger for a new spiritual vision and way of living within the natural world beyond consumerism (35-40).

While the conviction that religion is the key to a new environmental paradigm is constant among its proponents, the acceptance of religious leadership is not: the controversy over traditional religion versus new religious movements is far from resolved. Generally, people who identify with a particular tradition or movement firmly believe that their religion or movement should lead the charge on environmental issues. There is little in the literature regarding the Abrahamic religions' stance on this issue, leading me to conclude that they automatically assume a leadership position in this regard. This may be simple fact rather than hubris: they have a great deal of adherents in the West who will likely not look elsewhere for guidance on environmental issues. C. Hamlin, a historian, and D.M. Lodge, a conservation biologist, both at Notre Dame point out "We believe that Americans will not choose to significantly reduce their environmental impact unless it becomes a priority of the mainstream religions, Christianity and Judaism, which three quarters of Americans identify as their faith" (Hamlin and Lodge 280).

The emerging spiritual movements are more vocal on this matter. Robert Nadeau is a well-rounded scholar, marrying such disciplines as environment science, economics and social sciences. He presents an interesting argument regarding the role of religion in environmentalism that is based on a scientific perspective. He posits that all deeply religious/spiritual experiences are essentially the same, regardless of the religion practised. When these experiences are measured, the left hemisphere of the brain that is responsible for language, is inactive. However, when asked to describe the experience, this part of the brain is necessarily reactivated and the experience is expressed in terms associated with the religion of the practitioner (i.e. in language that they have learned is relevant to their religious experience). Therefore, even though all people share similar religious experiences, they will always view them as different and unique to their religion because that is how the learned language

describes them. It can therefore not be expected that members of traditional religions will recognise their similarity with other religions, nor to work together on projects—such as environmentalism—based on this similarity. We therefore need the emerging spiritual movements that are not yet entrenched in terminology to lead the way in this endeavour (Nadeau 137-149).

Bron Taylor is a professor of Religion, Nature and Environment Ethics at the University of Florida. I rely heavily on his extensive works regarding Nature-Based religions as well as the intersection of spirituality and the natural environment, particularly as it relates to the sacralisation of nature. Taylor suggests three possible scenarios that will define religion's place within the environmental arena: traditional religions will reform to become more environmentally responsible, traditional religions will be replaced by nature religions or pantheism, or new green religions will emerge (as cited in Sponsel 90). My hope is that this is not an "either-or" situation; that there is room for all of humanity, regardless of their religious or spiritual identification, in a global move towards environmental care and sustainability. Macy sees a resurgence of non-dualistic spiritualties such as Buddhism, but she also believes it is happening in factions of the Abrahamic religions as well as a renewed interest in indigenous spiritual practices (Macy 148). In this section I explore several emerging spiritual movements and take a fresh look at Christianity with a view to understanding their pro-environment stances.

Emerging Religions

The world of emerging religions and spiritual movements is murky and ill-defined. Different authors, and indeed different practitioners, categorise the myriad of sects in diverse ways, thwarting my best efforts to slot them neatly into pigeon-holes. In the sub-sections that follow, I have chosen, rather arbitrarily, to address Neo-Paganism as one category and Nature-Based Spiritualities as another, with New Age included as a subset of the latter group. At a more granular level, many of the sects that fall under what I have chosen to call 'Emerging

Religions' have unique beliefs and practices. However, when considering their positions on the natural environment, I found a great degree of overlap and shared perspective. My groupings have been organised to best address this subject matter, and may deviate from those of my references and the adherents themselves.

Neo-Paganism

Neo-Paganism is the umbrella under which many diverse spiritual sects may find themselves (Wicca, Druid, Neo-Shaman etc.). Dale Wallace, a South African scholar of comparative religions who devotes much of her research to Paganism, suggests that these groups may differ significantly on factors such as deities and rituals, but share some fundamental premises about the essence of the natural world and humanity's relationship to it. For example, Wiccans typically worship a goddess while other Pagans may honour a deity that is equally masculine and feminine or no anthropomorphic deity at all (Wallace 81). Indeed this individuality is perhaps the most striking similarity that these movements share. David Riches, a social anthropologist at St. Andrews University teamed up with Ruth Prince to publish several works about the latter's in-depth study of the New Age community at Glastonbury in the UK. They posit that among the New Age and Neo-Pagan communities, adherents are allowed the freedom to "do their own thing" and can draw on any number of traditional or non-traditional religious and/or secular influences (Prince and Riches 107). However, regardless of the individual religious belief, there is a shared cosmology among these movements that has a significant influence on their relationships with the natural environment.

The goddess is a central figure to many Neo-Pagans. According to Starhawk, a witch and activist, she is immanent and represented in the earth, sea and moon. She represents the feminine divine worshipped in many different forms by various ancient cultures. In fact the words used to describe the goddess often seem to echo those that describe the Abrahamic god: "The primary symbol for 'That-Which-Cannot-Be-Told' is the Goddess. The Goddess has infinite

aspects and thousands of names—she is the reality behind many metaphors. She *is* reality, the manifest deity, omnipresent in all of life, in each of us. The Goddess is not separate from the world—she *is* the world and all things in it" (Starhawk as quoted in Luhrmann 221). Tanya Luhrmann, an anthropologist at Stanford specialising in Wicca, suggests that the goddess is much more grounded in this earth; more a part of nature than the Abrahamic god, who is seen as a transcendent being. She is not only in nature but indeed is nature. She is often represented by symbols of webs, spirals or circles. Such imagery promotes the interconnectedness of all life, especially that of humanity with the rest of nature. "We are of the world, not autonomous individuals but connected wholes, and the important lessons come through letting go of that frightened separation from the world other people" (Luhrmann 222).

Kathryn Rountree, an anthropologist from New Zealand, studies Neo-Pagan and Native Faith movements. She notes that the first principle of the Pagan Federation (founded in 1971) is "Love for and kinship with nature". Their worldview suggests that "the natural, supernatural, and human social worlds are not separate from, or models for/of, one another but constitute one indivisible sacred world" (Rountree 305-6). Neo-Paganism's definition of society includes all of Earth's eco-system, therefore this spiritual movement has at its core the maintenance and well-being of that eco-system.

We also see in Neo-Paganism a desire to reclaim what is perceived to have been lost over the course of history. There is a reaching back towards ancient ways and religions.

> "They share the goal of living in harmony with nature, and they tend to view humanity's 'advancement' and separation from nature as the prime source of alienation…they gravitate to ancient symbols and ancient myths to the old polytheistic religions of the Greeks, the Egyptians, the Celts and the Sumerians. They are reclaiming these sources, transforming them into something new" (Adler as quoted in Luhrmann 219).

Druidry, like other forms of Neo-Paganism offers a deep connection to nature. This acts as a grounding for its adherents, providing a deeper understanding of their true selves (Cooper 51).

Many Neo-Pagans are animists who view all elements of nature—plants, animals, rocks, streams etc.—as conscious and en-souled. This soul or spirit may be inherent in the natural element itself or may belong to a supernatural being that inhabits that place or element. In addition to providing a home for these cohabitants, "the landscape itself is, for Pagans, an infinitely complex network of intersubjective relationships among living, sentient beings. Humans are not central to this eco-system…" (Rountree 306-308).

Throughout the literature on Neo-Paganism we see a conscious and concerted effort to resacralise nature, either through the imposition of a deity onto the natural environment or by imbuing the natural elements themselves with sanctity. Neo-Paganism is above all concerned with relationships among people, the earth and supernatural beings. As such, landscapes are highly important: "The earth is at once home, kin and deity" (Rountree 308).

Rountree draws a distinction between the animism practiced by Indigenous people throughout the world and that of Neo-Pagans. For the former (e.g. Maori, Australian Aboriginals) animism is "not a principle of faith…but an orientation to the world and specific tracts of land that systematically determines every aspect of daily living" (313). For Neo-Pagans, animism is a choice and relates primarily to "religious belief, ritual and recreational activity" (314). As such, it does not influence every-day activity or define rules regarding how to live one's life. However, a sense of kinship with nature, which is deepened through ritual, contributes to an empathy for the natural world. Unlike the Indigenous people noted above, Neo-Pagans who have elected to follow an animistic ideology continue to live in a society where this ideology is not supported. "Neo-Paganism is still a minority path within a pluralist society: therefore their world view does not, and could not, determine every aspect of daily life in the way it does for many animist societies" (317). Despite this distinction, Rountree ends her article on a positive note, suggesting that by embracing this ideology, Neo-Pagans may contribute to a shift in the dominant worldview and by extension, influence a change in the treatment of the natural environment.

Perhaps one of the most striking commonalities among Neo-Pagans is their rejection of a more structured, monotheistic religion. Much of the allure of Neo-Paganism lies in the freedom from religious constraints and dogma. We see in Neo-Pagans not only a turn towards immanent deities and an appreciation of ancient spirituality, but a rejection of a transcendent, separate god and the institutionalisation that surrounds it (Luhrmann 220). They criticise much of what defines Western Christian society (e.g. consumerism, progress etc.) especially human/nature dualism and the Christian tenet of humanity's dominion over the rest of nature (Rountree 306).

Neo-Paganism opposes the tenet embraced by the Abrahamic religions that humanity's raison d'etre is to transcend life on earth. The sacred and the mundane become intertwined; nature is a manifestation of an immanent divine with which they can engage. Praxis of this belief system is most often expressed through ritual encounters with the divine in nature, which are deliberate measures taken to counter the dualism of traditional religions (Wallace 81).

This rejection of the monotheistic religions was also recorded by Michael Cooper, a professor of religion and contemporary culture, in his article "Pathways to Druidry". Many of the voices recorded in his paper speak of disdain for Christianity (the religion in which they were raised) largely due to the human/other dualism that is so prevalent within its teachings. One of these voices, upon hearing at church that humans are the only beings with souls said "it was then that I tossed the book [Bible] aside and when to the source—the Earth, the Mother of All Life" (Perrin as quoted in Cooper 49).

Another of Cooper's interviewees also rejected the religion of his upbringing: "and to have a religion …that embraces nature and makes your lifestyle part of your religious experience—I don't think the monotheistic religions do that" (Ellison as quoted in Cooper 49). Cooper was able to trace the commitment to Druidry back to the disillusion or frustration with another religion (typically Christianity). These Neo-Druids typically experience a disconnect between their deep-seated beliefs and the reality of Christianity's offerings.

The image of a transcendent god has been a major influence in the state of our environment: God is outside the order of nature and we therefore feel free to plunder its resources. However "the model of the goddess, who is immanent in nature, fosters respect for the sacredness of all living things. Witchcraft can be seen as a religion of ecology. Its goal is harmony with nature so that life may not just survive, but thrive" (Starhawk 34-35). There is a deep connection between worshipping the divine in nature and the need to protect it. In this way, environmental activism is a sacred practice (Luhrmann 220).

Unfortunately, while the recognition of the sanctity of nature is honoured through ritual, it often doesn't translate into day-to-day life or environmental activism. The exception to this can be found in feminist traditions where women and the earth are united as victims of colonisation. From the feminist Neo-Pagan stance: "We are nature and to heal Nature we heal ourselves" (Harris as quoted in Wallace 82).

When Starhawk re-released her book *The Spiral Dance* on the twentieth anniversary of its original publication, she added a section based on her experiences and learning during the intervening decades. Within these pages she admits that praxis among witches often falls short of their ideology as a religion of ecology. She makes it a personal challenge to constantly promote a lifestyle of living in harmony with nature—even in urban settings—beyond the rituals that naturally embrace this ideology (Starhawk 264).

Nature-Based Spiritualties

Nature-based spiritualties, unlike traditional religions, have no Bibles or guide books. There is no messiah to provide humanity with rules to govern their behaviours and beliefs. Rather, groups that fall under the umbrella of nature-based spirituality (or Earth-based spirituality: I use the terms interchangeably) tend to borrow beliefs and guiding insights from other religions (e.g. Eastern and Indigenous religions) and belief systems, and cobble these together into a 'bricolage', an "eclectic spiritual stew" under a new banner (Taylor "Part 1" 178).

Bron Taylor suggests that the umbrella term 'Earth-based spiritualties' comprises many movements such as deep ecology, radical environmentalism, New Age and Neo-Paganism ("Part 1" 179). Once again this demonstrates how the lines have been blurred within this arena. What follows applies many of these, however I have devoted a separate section to Neo-Paganism (above) and included a small piece concerning New Age at the end of this section.

The term Deep Ecology was coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1972 to capture the idea that nature has intrinsic value (in contrast to the shallow anthropocentric view of nature in terms of its instrumental utility to humanity). Proponents of Deep Ecology argue that all of humanity shares an innate appreciation for the sanctity and interconnectedness of all life. This idea of perennial philosophy was taken from Aldous Huxley:

> Philosophia Perennis—the phrase was coined by Leibniz; but the thing—the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being—the thing is immemorial and universal. Rudiments of the perennial philosophy may be found among the traditional lore of the primitive peoples in every region of the world, and in its fully develop forms it has a place in every one of the higher religions. (Huxley as cited in Taylor "Part 1" 179)

This global religion can still be seen in indigenous and Eastern religions as well as the mystic forms of the Abrahamic religions.

Naess believed that 'deep ecology' was very much a part of Indigenous spirituality and that it is available to anybody who seeks it out. He cautions that one must leave the confines of the city in order to do so: such sensitivity can be found only through an extended stay in 'free nature'. "If a great deal of technique and apparatus are placed between oneself and nature, nature cannot possibly be reached" (Naess as cited in Taylor "Part 1" 181).

This practice is followed by many people in the West to forge a closer bond with nature. While promoters of Earth-based religions can sometimes be found to use peyote, magic mushrooms or other hallucinogens to heighten their spiritual connection to nature, most believe that the simple act of immersing oneself in nature is sufficient to foster recognition of the sanctity of the natural world. Participation in Earth-based spiritualties grew throughout the 1960s facilitated by the drug culture, a renewed interest in indigenous spirituality and the prevalence of nature-based ritual such as sweat lodges (Taylor "Part 1" 181-184).

The Earth-based spiritualties tend to adopt one of two paths: that of radical environmentalism as exemplified in the Earth First! movement and the life-style oriented approach as seen in the Rainbow family. The latter are influenced by New Age spirituality that embraces a harmony between humanity and the natural environment. These movements are often at odds over their interpretation of spirituality and their environmental practices. For example, the Rainbow family may wear crystals in order to benefit from their healing powers, while Earth First! members eschew ornaments that require mining the earth's resources in any way (Taylor "Part 1" 184).

Perhaps due to the differing factions sharing the Earth-based spiritual umbrella, as well as its 'bricolage' structure, ambivalence permeates the belief systems and praxis within this loose organisation of groups. Some members choose to express their spirituality through environmental activism, rejecting the use of 'woo woo' ritual as ineffective and even anti-spiritual. Even within the Earth First! movement, the founders were at odds over their spiritual beliefs and aspirations for the organisation. While spiritually was accepted and encouraged, founder Dave Foreman (writing under the pseudonym of Chim Blea) "urged activists to resist delusions of self-importance that that can make such quests more important than activism" (Bela as cited in Taylor "Part 1" 186). On a broader scale, radical environmentalists typically share a pessimistic view of humanity's situation; some even feel that the anticipated ecological collapse might be a necessary step to reharmonising life on earth. New Agers are generally

more optimistic that a peaceful, sustainable outcome can be achieved without such upheaval (Taylor “Part 1” 185-186).

Environmental praxis among the nature-based spiritual community takes on many forms. Some, like evangelists, travel from town to town delivering their messages to eager or reluctant audiences through music, verse or lectures. “What unites these diverse road show performers is their belief that the arts…can transport person imaginatively into the wilderness, evoking in the deep, intuitive and mystical knowledge of the sacredness of earth all life”. Ritual in the form of dancing, erotic play and wilderness camps play a significant role in unifying adherents. More serious types of ritual, such as the enactment of plays, tribal unity or war dances are all practiced to achieve a desired outcome or to honour or empower a comrade (Taylor "Part 2" 226).

Since the 1980s, the Council of All Beings has become an important “innovative form of ritualising that promotes mystical identification with non-human species” (Taylor “Part 2” 229). This ritual was created by John Seed, and Australian environmentalist, and Joanna Macy. Viewed by many as an initiation into earth-based spirituality, the Council of All Beings provides an environment where attendees can mourn their separation and loss, and remember their rootedness in nature. The ritual culminates with an exercise during which each member sheds their identity and speaks as the voice of a non-human being. This ritual is not seen as a substitute for activism, but to provide a larger context in which other environmental action can be framed (Seed 14).

Nature-based spiritual communities often engage in other advanced rituals that are typically modeled on indigenous practices. These rituals involving shamanic journeying and meditative breathing are designed to promote communication with other natural life forms. Rituals such as these typically include a ‘sacred intention’ for the healing of the planet as well as a means for participants to better understand their purpose for life on Earth. It is generally believed that these rituals contribute to healing not only for the participants but for the entire

natural world: that the raising of a single person's consciousness becomes part of consciousness-raising on a universal scale. In this way, people who engage in such rituals—in either solitary or shared environments—are participating in activism designed to further a greater good (Taylor "Part 2" 230).

For most members of the earth-based spiritual community, spirituality and its praxis through environmental activism cannot be effective without science. In order to establish sustainable ecosystems we must "integrate science and spirituality for science without heart is useless" (Clarkton as cited in Taylor "Part 2" 235). In fact many New Agers (and Neo-Pagans) believe that their spirituality is endorsed by quantum theory, an understanding that is effecting a paradigm shift in human consciousness (Taylor "Part 2" 235; Rountree 316).

As has been shown here, nature-based spiritualties comprise a spectrum of beliefs attitudes and practices. At one end, we find the mystical forms of spirituality wherein devotees believe that their rituals, prayers and meditations can effect true change. At the other, adherents see Gaia not as a goddess but as a living system facing a dire future. These nature-based spiritualists look for answers in the realm of science and tend towards activism rather than ritual in their environmental endeavours. Despite these differences, all members of these groups share the perception that "Earth-based spiritually is about one's felt connections with, embeddedness in, and belong to, this living and sacred earth" (Taylor "Part 1" 186).

New Age

The New Age movement is named for the Age of Aquarius and gained popularity, particularly in reference to hippies, during the 1960s and 70s. However, most would agree that its roots can be found among Theosophists such as Rudolf Steiner and that it draws influence from the Eastern religions. George Chryssides, a research fellow at the University of Birmingham studying emerging religious movements, deems Marilyn Ferguson's 1982 book *The Aquarian Conspiracy,* to be an important landmark in New Age movement. Ferguson described

a new emerging culture that eschewed authority and ritual in favour of a spirituality based on direct knowledge, experience and human wholeness. This spirituality would "emphasise meditation, healing and recognition of one's inner divine nature". These personal transformations would be accompanied by political and social change (Chryssides 9). This utopian view of a new phase in humanity's evolution can be seen throughout the New Age community today as we shift from the Age of Pisces to the Age of Aquarius.

Within the New Age movement, we see a similar sense of interconnectedness with the natural world, although in most cases an anthropomorphic deity is absent. Nature and all its elements are seen as inherently sacred in their own right. Prince and Riches suggest that New Agers are striving to emulate tribal societies, such as those found in pre-colonial America and Africa, as they are perceived as "having evolved a spiritually imbued harmony with their surrounding environment, wherein humans are both part of and responsible for an overarching ecological equilibrium" (109).

New Age beliefs suggest that a divine force is present in all of nature, which must therefore be treated with reverence and respect. This belief system is highly influenced by Eastern religion and has become manifest in practices such as vegetarianism, consumption of organic foods, and activism for animal rights and environmentalism. The concept of connectedness is central to New-Age thought: not only are humans connected to each other, but to all elements of the natural environment (Hedlund-de Witt 1058). Catherine Albanese, a professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, suggests that within the New Age community, humanity's world is a scaled-down version of the macrocosm, of the entire universe, and as such "the message is clearly connection". The natural environment and spirit are continuous. Harmony with nature is encouraged as that is where spirit can be found (Albanese 134). On a deeper level, for individuals and their natural environment, "the New Age movement celebrates a non-dualistic conception, whereby the physical, the spiritual, the mental, and the emotion in the human are indissolubly one" (Prince and Riches 107).

The consequences of this belief are twofold. First, it promotes a feeling of responsibility towards humanity, nature and the earth, encouraging adherents to treat them with respect. Secondly, the notion that every action—and indeed every thought—has far-reaching consequences empowers New Agers with a sense of meaning and purpose. Individuals are motivated to contribute to a greater good, to strive to affect change within the community and the environment, and to actively participate in the evolution of consciousness (Hedlund-de Witt 1059).

The praxis of these values is not as straightforward as might be expected. Annick Hedlund-de Witt conducts research into, among other issues, sustainable development, cultural change and bio-economics. Her work provides insight into the potentials and pitfalls for sustainable development practices among these emerging spiritual movements. Among the potentials she includes an overall greening of individual lifestyles, responsibility and empowerment of the individual, willingness for change, focus on inner fulfillment (with a resultant reduction in consumerism), and increased creativity. Some of the pitfalls she identifies are exclusive focus on inner work at the cost of addressing social issues, regression to or romanticising of mythic pre-rational consciousness, and the potential to use spirituality as a means for wealth enhancement. Perhaps most interesting is her argument (and Campbell's before her) that the one of the biggest obstacles to the New Age worldview taking hold, is that its holism of religion and science serves to reverse the segregation of religious and secular spheres that occurred during the Enlightenment (Hedlund-de Witt 1057-1065; Campbell as cited in Hedlund-de Witt 1062).

While New Agers look to a future that embraces peace, harmony and freedom from materialism, they are also very much attuned to ancient history. Specifically, they have a deep respect for early tribal societies (e.g. pre-colonial North America and Africa) and in many ways strive to emulate aspects of these societies. "Tribal peoples are regarded as having evolved a spiritually-imbued harmony with their surrounding environment wherein humans are both part of

and responsible for an overarching ecological equilibrium; such a cosmological outlook New Agers believe, eventuates beneficially in responsible economic and ecological practice" (Prince and Riches 109). However accurate this romanticised vision of tribal society may be, it nonetheless motivates New Agers towards positive environmental practices.

Hedlund-de Witt suggests that New Age adherents feel a sense of urgency regarding the environmental crises facing humanity today, and that this motivates their actions both in terms of their own habits as well as activism. Further, their "orientation toward inner and spiritual fulfillment rather than material fulfillment has the potential to alleviated hyper-consumerism and its associated stress on resources and pollution, as well as support a transition to a green economy, with a shift in emphasis from goods to services as well as green production and consumption" (1059).

Indeed this act of looking inward expands to create a much greater result. As noted in the sub-section above, the raising of individual consciousness is believed to contribute to the raising of humanity's collective consciousness. Therefore through simple acts such as meditation and prayer, each individual is not only engaged in helping themselves, but in affecting change in all of humanity and beyond. I will be touching on this belief again in Section Three.

Revisiting Christianity

In the previous sections of this paper, I portrayed Christianity as decidedly unfriendly towards the natural environment. This was an intentional effort to address the more destructive side of the religion. For there was, and continues to be, a position held among some members of the Christian faith, that humanity holds dominion over all of nature, and that it was given to us to use as we please. Unfortunately, this attitude has led to some truly devastating environmental consequences. However, there is another side to the Christian coin: that of stewardship. As with so many social issues, the Bible offers up ample fodder for both sides of

the discourse on treatment of nature. In this sub-section I look at Christianity's more benevolent view of the environment, as well as what we can expect to see from its various institutions in their position as leaders of their communities.

The gift of God's creation is interpreted by some Christians not as something they have come to own, but rather something for which they have been given responsibility. David Hallman, who worked on environmental ethics within the United Church of Canada, suggests that as stewards of the earth, humanity should maintain and care for it, just as a home-owner protects their property. As with the argument for dominion, humanity's position of superiority is never in question, however it adopts a less strident connotation within the stewardship camp. "Our intelligence implies greater responsibility, not greater privilege" (Hallman 34).

The conflicting positions of dominion and stewardship both place humanity well apart from the rest of nature, underlining a dualism that sets Christianity apart from the emerging religions discussed above. The notion that nature is somehow 'out there' is present in virtually every Christian argument concerning the treatment of the natural environment. Even the most generous argument for stewardship carries with it the belief that humanity knows what is best for the planet—a position that is both inevitable and potentially dangerous. Hallman suggests that we must do everything we can to retain our humility when faced with such responsibility (35).

This position appears to spring from two basic Christian tenets. The first is that there is an inherent hierarchy to nature and that humans always come out on top. Lohmann, professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics at Humboldt University in Berlin, argues in favour of the intrinsic value of nature while still supporting the notion of "dignity as proper only to humans". He argues that this is not anthropocentric but rather holistic: the world is a well-ordered structure where everything is interconnected and in which "human superiority is part of the system" (85). He therefore suggests that all of creation should be treated with respect, but not equally. For others, such as Hallman cited above, stewardship is problematic as it places humans in a

position of superiority. For Lohmann, the hierarchical system is inherent and necessary (Lohmann 85-100).

The second tenet supporting the dualism of humanity/nature is the fear of pantheism that pervades institutional Christianity. The need to preserve God's transcendence—and by extension his human form and the throne in the heavens from which he rules—seems to dominate Christian ideology. If man (sic) was created in God's image, then God cannot be seen as manifest in all elements of the universe. However, there are Christians who find themselves able to break free from this position while maintaining their identification with Christianity and a deep attachment to the faith tradition. Indeed Primavesi (as cited inLeduc 56) argues that an understanding of an immanent god is crucial if Christianity is going to provide leadership in a response to climate change.

A brief look into history reveals pockets of environmentalism among Christians throughout the ages. I look to Elizabeth Johnson, a Catholic feminist theologian, for input into the early Christian relationship with the natural environment. Around the time that Christianity was being adopted as the official religion of Rome, St. Augustine preached that the Bible was actually two books: one of sacred scripture and one of nature. He taught that if we learn to read the book of nature correctly, we will be led to God's true wisdom, power and love (Johnson 6). In the 11th–12th centuries, Hildegard of Bingen saw the universe as "imbued with the love of Christ", Bonaventure envisioned it as a wonderful work of art that displayed signs of its maker and Thomas Aquinas saw the entire cosmos as an image of God (Johnson 7). At around the same time, St. Francis of Assisi had renounced material wealth and was living a life modeled on that of Jesus. He held a strong belief that all of nature was divine creation; he referred to other creatures—and indeed other elements of the cosmos—as his brothers and sisters. He was named the patron saint of ecology by Pope John Paul II in 1979.

Within the last two centuries, early American environmentalists have spoken out about the natural environment, through either an overt or more subtle Christian lens. John Muir, a

Calvinist and co-founder of the Sierra Club, wrote extensively about his experiences in the western American wilderness. He advocated for the preservation of the wild spaces, rather than the more popular conservation that would see nature tamed and controlled. Muir can be seen as nothing but a Christian pantheist, as evidenced in his words:

> I wish you could come here and rest a year in the simple unmingled Love fountains of God. You would then return to your scholars with fresh truth gathered and absorbed from pines and waters and deep singing winds, and you would find that they all sang of fountain Love just as did Jesus Christ and all of pure God manifest in whatever form. You say that good men are "nearer to the heart of God than are woods and fields, rocks and waters" Such distinctions and measurements seem strange to me. Rocks and waters, etc., are words of God and so are men. We all flow from one fountain Soul. All are expressions of one Love. God does not appear, and flow out, only from narrow chinks and round bored wells here and there in favored races and places, but He flows in grand undivided currents, shoreless and boundless over creeds and forms and all kinds of civilizations and peoples and beasts, saturating all and fountainizing all. (Muir)

Similarly, Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest and an early pioneer in the American environmental movement, had a pantheistic vision of the divine:

> The ancient human-Earth relationship must be recovered in a new context, in its mystical as well as in its physical functioning. There is need for awareness that the mountains and rivers and all living things, the sky and its sun and moon and clouds all constitute a healing, sustaining sacred presence for humans which they need as much for their psychic integrity as for their physical nourishment. This presence whether experienced as Allah, as Atman, as Sunyata, or as the Buddha-nature or as Bodhisattva; whether as Tao or as the One or as the Divine Feminine, is the atmosphere in which humans breathe deepest and without which they eventually suffocate. (Berry)

We can also find many examples of people, such as Henry David Thoreau and Aldo Leopold, who were non-practicing Christians who viewed the natural environment as a wondrous community.

In the current era, the various denominations, sects and smaller groups that huddle under the Christian umbrella offer safe harbour to a broad spectrum of adherents who find support for their personal environmental positions within their embrace. John Haught, a Roman Catholic theologian at Georgetown University, explores several movements that support environmentalism within a Christian framework. First, Christian apologists believe that Christianity provides the basis for environmental stewardship: the virtues of compassion, humility moderation, detachment and gratitude all underpin good environmental practices. Many Christians have departed from these virtues and a return to them is all that is needed to improve the human-nature relationship (Haught 229).

Another movement suggests that "the natural is at heart a symbolic disclosure of God" and this should discourage Christians from turning the planet into raw material for our consumption (Haught 233). This position allows Christians to acknowledge the sanctity of nature without resorting to pantheism. This sacramental approach not only sees sin as humanity's separation from God but also from nature, therefore redemption and reconciliation refer to the healing not only of the human-god relationship but also humanity's relationship with all of creation.

In a drastic departure from the Reconstructionism discussed earlier (in which the Rapture will not occur until such time as the earth is spent), the cosmic promise approach suggests that a "resplendent fulfillment awaits the entire universe" (Haught 237). This implies that all of creation—rather than humans alone—look forward together to a brilliant future. Humanity therefore cannot simply discard their earthly home for a heavenly one.

In her article "Saving the Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States", Laurel Kearns, a professor of Religion and Environmental Studies, identified three movements

competing for adherents among Christian environmentalists. The Christian Stewardship Ethic reinterprets the Genesis verses cited earlier as lessons in humanity's stewardship—rather than domination—over God's creation. It views the ecological crisis as resulting from humanity's lack of repentance for our sins of arrogance, ignorance and greed. The Creation Spirituality Ethic, founded by Matthew Fox, rejects humanity's privileged position in the cosmos, situating us as just one part of a whole. This model requires that we overcome the dualisms of the western worldview in order to repair environmental issues and is often criticised for conceptualising God in pantheistic terms and crossing the line into paganism. The Eco-Justice Ethic focuses primarily on the marriage of church perspectives with political and social praxis (Kearns 55-70).

In the late 1990s, Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions hosted a series of conferences on world religions and ecology. The tome that contains the essays delivered at the Christian edition of this series is filled with hope and vision for an environmental Christianity. The introduction promises that "the essays in this volume announce that an ecological reformation, or eco-justice reorientation, of Christian theology and ethics is now prominently on the ecumenical agenda" and that the reformation will see a reinterpretation of Christian doctrine to encourage a new relation between humans and other elements of nature (Hessel and Ruether xxxvii). Fifteen years after the publication of these words, the abundance of Christian environmental websites appears to demonstrate that the promise is being kept.

I will close this sub-section with a look towards the Vatican. Not only does the Pope hold the most powerful position in Christendom, but indeed one of the most influential positions in the world. The fact that the current Pope named himself after St. Francis of Assisi bodes well for how he will follow through on issues pertaining to the environment: during the writing of this paper, Pope Francis called for broad and immediate environmental action in his Encyclical on climate change. He is unique among his fellow office-holders for many reasons, not the least of which is his prioritisation of environmental health over economic gain.

Despite Christianity's best efforts at stewardship, one might despair that it may never be able to fully endorse the sacralisation of the natural environment as long as its one god maintains a formidable distance from Earth. However, half a century ago, the theologian Paul Tillich challenged traditional Western Christian thinking when he introduced the concept of God as the g*round of being* (Robinson 22). God was not to be viewed as a white-haired man in the sky or as a personal being at all; God was the underlying essence of life itself, with no boundaries, shape or form. Tillich presents us with a ubiquitous god that lives in, and gives life to, human and non-human nature. This pantheistic view of God is gaining traction among a Western Christian minority who have endeavoured to reconnect with the sacredness of the natural world. In a similar vein, the Papal Encyclical suggests that "nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it" (Encyclical 139).

This discussion is offered with cautious optimism: Christianity is indeed in a position to provide leadership in environmental issues, if it so chooses. However, as noted in the previous section, it can just as easily be used to not only undermine efforts to protect the natural environment but also to entirely discredit any concern humanity might express about our earthly home.

Conclusion of Section Two

The resacralisation of nature appears to be well underway among adherents of the emerging spiritual movements who see the divine in all elements of nature and place the interconnection of all life (human and non-human) at the centre of their environmental arguments. This position has even begun to take hold among environmentally-conscious Christians who are lessening their grip on a staunch dualistic vision of God's creation, but who are still reluctant to embrace pantheism.

It is discouraging then, to see that this profound relationship with the natural environment does not always translate into positive environmental praxis. In the conclusion to Section One, I took heart from Kohak's suggestion that if we choose to remove the built constructs that stand between us and the presence of God we may see the sacred spaces that are all around us, opening doorways to the divine (187-188). My assumption that this exercise would lead to positive environmental praxis has been challenged by my findings.

In spite of this, I see the growing awareness of, and attention to environmental issues among both traditional and emerging religious/spiritual groups to be a positive indicator of improved action in the future. I believe that strong leadership within the religious and spiritual communities, as demonstrated by Pope Francis's recent Encyclical and Starhawk's call to environmental action in *The Spiral Dance* (364-365) can significantly influence behaviour in this regard. As the environmental situation becomes more urgent, I expect that the chorus of such voices will grow.

SECTION THREE: INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSION

Research Participants

My research participants are all residents of the municipality of La Peche, Quebec, most of them residing in, or very close to, the village of Wakefield. My sole selection criterion was that my participants consider themselves to be spiritual (with two exceptions: Jeff and Carolyn, a young couple of organic farmers who do not consider themselves to be spiritual.) Basic info about them is provided here:

Name	Occupation	'Mother' Religion	Current Religion
Ellen	Retired editor, active volunteer locally and abroad	Southern Baptist	New Age
Jessica	Holistic healing	Catholic	New Age
Michael	Director of an environmental NGO, candidate for Masters of Divinity	Catholic	United Church
Carolyn	Farmer	None	None
Jeff	Farmer	None	None
Wendy	Retired teacher	Methodist	Baha'i
Daniel	Active volunteer locally and abroad	Christian	Undefined
Allison	Public service	Did not specify	SGI (Buddhist)
Monica	Retired	Indigenous/Christian	Baha'i
Tom	Environmental/conservation	Catholic	Undefined
Pamela	Retired	None	Undefined
Ben	Landscaper	Catholic	Undefined
Naomi	Writer, yoga instructor	Jehovah's Witness	Undefined
Sharon	Home care, Reiki, massage, artist	Did not specify	Neo-Pagan
Kate	Singer/songwriter	United Church	Undefined

I looked to these individuals in an effort to better understand how the resacralisation of nature might lead to positive environmental change on a broad scale. I planned to delve into their beliefs regarding the sanctity of nature and examine how these beliefs influence their environmental praxis, hoping to draw a link between a sacralised natural world and positive environmental action. Further, I hoped to explore how these individual beliefs and practices might be adopted on a broader scale, all the while understanding that this small group of people were likely not representative of the Western population at large. Some of them acknowledged

their awareness of their unique situation: “we live in this sort of flaky green community” (Pamela), “I understand that Wakefield is a bubble” (Carolyn), “there’s a lot of light workers in this region…a lot of love and light” (Sharon). My research participants represented to me the epitome of my vision of a resacralised natural world: they live within a sacred natural landscape and treat it with respect and care. Through my interviews, I hoped to confirm this perception and explore how their situation might translate outside of their community.

As I began interviewing, I was struck both by the patterns that emerged as well as by the unique insights that were shared in virtually every conversation. Because of their broader implications, I focus this discussion on the ideas that resurfaced repeatedly throughout the interviews.

Choosing a Spiritual Home

The majority of my research participants were born and raised in Christian homes. In much the same way that Cooper discovered his research subjects had left traditional religious backgrounds before embarking on a Neo-Pagan spiritual path, I learned that the majority of my participants rejected the religion of their upbringing. In some cases, this occurred very early in life; for others the shift occurred well into adulthood. Some participants experienced rifts that were precipitated by painful or upsetting experiences within the church environment. In one such case, a childhood friend who had given birth as a teenager was made to endure a very public sermon expounding the evils of fornication at the baby’s baptism. Only one participant attributed his departure from the Catholic Church to his understanding of humanity’s relationship with the natural environment. He had worked for an environmental NGO and spent time among tribal people in Africa who lived a very different existence than the ‘man shall have dominion over the Earth’ message of his church. “So over time I started realising that this is not working and we need to become aware of the subtleties of things like Indigenous knowledge and take a cue from elsewhere, not from our religion or from what we’ve been indoctrinated into…So that was the shift from Catholicism to this more holistic way of looking at nature” (Tom).

The large majority of participants simply found themselves unable to relate to the teachings and/or praxis of their 'mother' religion. While it was never expressly discussed during the interviews, I suspect that many of the participants differed in their views from a very early age and were likely too immature to accurately articulate their feelings towards the church or why they felt compelled to leave.

One particularly intriguing story came from the sole participant who chose not to leave Christianity. A French Canadian man who was born into a Roman Catholic environment, Michael would eventually find many reasons to disassociate from his church: he came out as a gay man, his parents were divorced and ostracised by the church, and he became disenchanted with the church's attitude toward women as well as its hierarchical structure. Michael left the Catholic Church, but never turned his back on Christianity, moving through a few congregations before settling on the United Church where he is now studying for the ministry. Although he heads up an environmental NGO, Michael admitted that his relationship with nature was not a relevant factor in his decision to leave the Catholic Church: "…in fact it is probably one of the areas where there was actually very little reason for me to leave the Catholic Church as I understood it on the basis of those issues at the time. In fact my very first environmental protest was with my Catholic school led by the people who were in charge of the religion department who wanted us to go and fight against the cutting of trees in Temagami. My understanding of environmentalism and the importance of ecology was not that separate from the church that I understood at that time. Now my understanding of the church has evolved and I can look at it from a more critical angle." I pressed Michael to re-examine this situation based on this current position: would he change churches to accommodate his environmental stance?

> No church in my view is going to represent 100% of what I believe. I'm going to need to either accept that the majority view where I am is not necessarily 100% aligned with where I am on that particular issue, or I'm going to try to change it from within, or if it's becoming so difficult then I have to find a new home. So I think that if I were in a

> congregation today where environmentalism or the view of how we engage with the world would be counter to what I believe I think that would certainly be a big factor—I would have to really evaluate where I was at. I haven't had to have that conversation internally but I think it would have a pretty big impact. (Michael)

While most participants did not cite their relationship with nature as an impetus to their departure from their mother religion, many did find this a significant factor in the definition of their new spiritual path. Some were active seekers, others were surprised by their spiritual awakenings. Ellen was fourteen when she rejected her strict Southern Baptist religion. She dabble in other religions: "I was open to things but didn't have a strong urge or need. For many years I considered myself an atheist and about seven or eight years ago, I was introduced to channelled material, and it had such a ring of truth, I pursued spirituality from that point of view" (Ellen). Conversely, after returning from a trip to Africa, Allison felt compelled to find answers to a series of spiritual questions that were plaguing her. She found those answers at a booth in her university student centre and has remained a member of the Soka Gakkai International (a lay Buddhist organisation).

For Ben, the path was long and circuitous. A spark was ignited in him as a nine-year-old child: "We lived on a farm and there was this huge wind storm. The wind was so strong that we could stand at less than a 45° angle and just be supported by the wind, so it was like flying. And I made a connection with the wind through that. There was something there, something exhilarating, something to do with the freedom of my spirit. That stayed with me from that day on" (Ben). Ben went on to spend decades travelling through the southern USA and Mexico, experimenting with various forms of Shamanism, Buddhism, dietary restrictions and hallucinogenic drug use. He has now established a personal spiritual system, cobbled together from his various experiences.

In fact this notion of a *bricolage*, as noted above in reference to Nature-Based spiritualties, surfaced many times during my interviews. Most participants were unable to easily

define their identification with a spiritual movement. “I am open to all kinds of different spiritual experiences” (Kate); “I don’t know that I identify with any one in particular My beliefs come from all different places—I’ve collected them in. I work with what resonates and what feels alive” (Naomi); “I really don’t identify with a specific religion. I would call myself non-religious but very spiritual. So with that means to me is along my path to spirituality I take the concepts and ideas that feel right to me. So in my heart if something feels good then I adhere to that” (Jessica).

These stand in stark contrast with those who do identify with a religion. The participants who identify as Baha’i, SGI or Christian have a solid and discrete framework by which they define their beliefs. Those who identified as Baha’i and SGI were much more eager to share sacred scripture or other writings in response to my interview questions, sending me emails after the interview to pass on teachings from their prophets regarding my research questions. None of the self-proclaimed spiritual participants cited specific works or contacted me after the interview. This suggests to me that the personal nature of their spirituality is just that: personal and unique.

It cannot be said that the participants took an environmental stand when leaving their mother religions, or that these events could be defined in any way as environmental activism. However, for many of the participants, their relationships with the natural environment helped to define the spiritual home where they would ultimately come to rest.

Interconnectedness with Nature

Virtually every one of the participants acknowledged a belief that humanity and nature are interconnected. For many this was a practical statement of fact as they experienced it. In their words: “I think that there’s no difference between the natural environment and humans. We’re all part of nature. What we do affects everything. What we think affects everything. I think that it’s completely interrelated” (Ellen); “Everything is part of nature and humans are just another part of that big cycle of evolution through nature…everything is one and what I do

affects the world" (Jessica); "I feel like [nature is] part of who we are: we're all part of the same energy, we're all part of the same essence" (Naomi).

This pragmatic approach brings with it a powerful motivation towards environmentalism. Those who adhere to this belief understand the importance of protecting the natural environment, as doing so ultimately benefits themselves. Nothing happens in a vacuum: every action has consequences that ripple throughout the natural world. Many who share this point of view understand that that which connects all of life—all of nature—is divine: "For me, god is in everything, so my description of god is basically consciousness…it's in the plants, it's in the rocks, it's in me, it's in you, it's in everything" (Jessica); "…this interaction between the mineral world to plant world to animal world to human and of course the divine. In all of that there's this intermingling and interdependence through all of those" (Monica).

Several people provided the same response in much the same simple language: "I see the divine in everything". However, for the atheist participants, the absence of the divine in nature did not diminish their commitment to a belief in humanity's connection to the natural world, nor did it erode their dedication to environmentalism (to be discussed in more detail below).

Despite their feelings of kinship with nature, a third of the participants felt that humanity held a special place in the natural world. Due to our unique abilities, it is humanity's responsibility to care for the earth. "And if I'm here for a reason and here in this spot of so much beauty and so much abundance…and I have a privileged position in that, then I have to steward this. There's no question" (Daniel). "…humans, kind of uniquely here on Earth, have some ability to direct nature, and I think that our role as a species is to direct it in positive ways" (Jeff). "I think that we should be stewards of the environment and take out as little as we need but not take out what we want" (Pamela). "There's a very intricate connection between people and their environment and it's our responsibility to protect the environment absolutely" (Allison). "I think we co-exist with everything around us, with the natural world as we see it, and all the forces we

don't see. And so we co-exist and I think that as humans we have an important role, a role that's different from other species" (Naomi).

I see in these responses the vestiges of the Christianity that was a contributor to the young lives of the participants and that continues to influence our culture. It would seem that they have drawn on the more positive aspects of Christianity's stance on the environment—that of stewardship rather than dominion—incorporating them into their individual belief systems. Once again, this sense of responsibility towards the natural environment, whatever its roots, serves only to motivate the participants into positive environmental practices.

Environmental Praxis

Regardless of religious or spiritual background, all of my research participants made conscious efforts to support their respect for the natural environment through practical ways of living. For many, this was manifest in simple changes to their lifestyles such as composting, recycling, sparing the lives of insects in their homes, maintaining a vegetarian diet and growing their own food. Many spoke of their commitments to community endeavours such as protecting Wakefield's fresh water spring and old growth forest. There was significant attention paid to the use of fossil fuels: several lamented the fact that living in a rural environment necessitated more time spent in a car. One participant drove a Smart car and several others indicated that they plan their days and weeks in such a way as to reduce time spent driving. Similarly, many focussed their household expenditures on fuel-efficiency measures rather than aesthetics.

Every one of the participants chose to live in a rural environment because of the desire—or even need—to be closer to nature. For some, any nature will do. For others, specific elements of nature such as trees, hills and water provide sustenance for them. Tom credits living on the edge of the river not only for nourishing him a daily basis but also for transforming his relationship with nature as a whole. For Michael, the forest is of primary importance. "I always ache to be in nature. The fact that I can sit on my porch and see an owl

that sits there and stares at me for half an hour—that I just get that kind of spiritual connection to my environment is critical" (Michael).

Many participants suggested that being outside of the city is essential for their well-being. For some, this is a matter of fact: "I could not possibly live in the city" (Ellen); 'I don't think I could live in the city again" (Daniel). Others expanded on their feelings: "...being away from all the human energy is super-restorative" (Allison); "I've lived in the city and the energy is not for me" (Sharon). While the choice to live in close proximity to untamed nature was important to all my research participants, this relationship often stretched into their livelihoods as well. For the artists, nature not only energises them, but also informs the content of their art. "I have much deeper writing if I go take some time in the woods…it's just like a slow grounding with the earth and with the connection, and then when I come into my writing it's coming from a much different place, my mind is much more embodied, it feels more grounded, it feels like it's not just from me—it's an energy that's moving through me" (Naomi). For a musician, "I write songs that have stuff about nature in them. They sometimes give a message although the reality is that every musician that writes folk music preaches to the converted. I have very few right-wing conservative corporate CEOS at my gigs but you know there's always a hope" (Kate).

For Jessica, a wellness consultant, the natural environment plays a significant role in her practice. Throughout the summer months Jessica leads workshops designed to teach how to better connect to nature. "I love bringing people to connect in a silent way. It allows them to experience a little bit of what I experience when I go into the woods to find special places, sacred spaces" (Jessica). Michael is the national director of an environmental NGO and is also studying for the ministry in the United Church. For Michael "there's no question in my mind that the work I do today at [my NGO] is part of my ministry. I see it as entirely tied to my call and my ability to play out what I believe. So it is quite central to me—and that's a pretty big chunk of what I do day-to-day" (Michael).

Michael embodies the ideal that motivated my research. The fact that he is a life-long Christian makes his example all the more poignant as it demonstrates strength, flexibility and passion. Michael has certainly faced challenges in his efforts to marry two very different careers. “I have to be careful because the progressive world in general looks upon the church and any kind of God talk as suspect”. In his work at the NGO, Michael often gets asked what he is studying. When he reveals he is doing a Masters of Divinity “you get one of two reactions: one that’s ‘wow that’s so great because I see the connection here’—like they immediately get it, or the ‘oh’ that suspicious look like ‘what does that have to do with anything’” (Michael).

What was apparent among all my research participants was their very conscious commitment to environmental action. This did not always lead to more broad-based activities such as activism or politics, however they were all committed to effecting change to the natural environment, if only at a personal level.

Nature as Temple

> If Saint John and Saint Paul could think of the Christ form of the universe, if Aquinas could say the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness more perfectly and represents it better than any single creature whatsoever, and if Teilhard could insist that the human gives to the entire cosmos its most sublime mode of being, then it should not be difficult to accept the universe itself as the primordial sacred community. (Berry as cited inFox 20)

During our interviews, I asked all of my research participants to describe their understanding of the relationship that humans share with the natural environment. I followed up by inquiring into how this relationship influenced their everyday lives. I was hoping to determine how their beliefs translated into praxis, receiving the expected responses regarding recycling, vegetarianism and other practices described above.

I was also surprised by fully half of the participants describing daily ritual that seemed, at least on the surface, to have little to do with the natural world. Many of them begin their day with

prayer that may or may not include nature: “And for years I’ve had a practice of in the morning, even before I open my eyes, of thanking the divine for this day and creating love in my heart for the health and love of my family and friends and just giving thanks and setting the intention to have a great day and be happy” (Ellen).

> …when I wake up in the morning before I’m leaving my bed I connect with my heart and I experience the sensation. I connect with the Earth, I connect with the sky and bring those energies in, and then I connect with my heart and have that radiate through my body and then radiate out of my body and through my home and through the village, through the province, through the world. (Naomi)
>
> I greet every morning by telling it ‘good morning’. Every morning is a good morning so you should greet and receive and give thanks to the morning…so that’s the light, the light that has been given to us, even the dark because in the winter in the Yukon it’s pitch black out there but it’s still morning. It’s another day coming. (Monica)
>
> I wake up every morning and spend some time, even if it’s five minutes, just considering what I have to be grateful for. And my body is always part of it, the outdoors is always part of it, my home is always part and the people I love. (Kate)

It became clear to me that these people see their spirituality enmeshed with nature; their ritual and prayer are manifestations of their beliefs. In the words of Matthew Fox “the primary sacrament is the universe itself” (16). They derive their energy—their life force—from the natural world and recognising this, they give thanks, each in their own individual way. I was also impressed by the generous and altruistic nature of these rituals that almost always included sending love and energy to others. These messages of gratitude and love were intended not only to enrich the lives of the sender but to heal all of humanity and the Earth itself.

In some cases, these daily rituals were more obviously linked to the participant’s relationship with nature. For Ben:

> It starts with opening the window and greeting the day and thanking Father Existence, Mother Love (which is everywhere but which gives meaning, gives direction to life) and Mother Earth which I'm part of and which is putting up with so much bullshit right now. And from there I move to gratitude. Gratitude, constantly cultivating gratitude, speaking to the valley, thanking the valley for being my home, thanking the forest for being my home, thanking the garden for the relations we share and thanking my home for being my home. (Ben)

For many of these people, nature is their church, their sanctuary. It is that place where they find solace, energy and a connection to the divine. "When I think of a forest or the natural environment, I find it's an area where personally I can really connect with that feeling of oneness; that felling of life force energy that's flowing through me and that's flowing through all the trees and through everything in nature" (Jessica). Tom has collected elements of nature and assembled them on his property as a kind of shrine.

> I've got things like rocks by the thousands outside that I go and collect. And what I'm really doing when I collect these stones and driftwood that are all around my property, all these things that I find when I go out to these places and that's my communing with nature. I'm just finding a tangible way to put my ethic in to practice because you can't always do it with your work. It's just me trying to get a handle on my relationship with nature. (Tom)

Because these people find a divine presence in nature, the wilderness becomes their place of worship and factors significantly into their spiritual ritual, wherever it may be performed.

Fear of Nature

One of the participants, Kate, expressed concern that with increased urbanisation comes a disassociation with the wilderness which ultimately leads to a fear of nature. She noted that the process of urbanisation is accelerating, particularly among new Canadians who typically

(and logically) settle in cities. "That means there are more and more people growing up in urban settings where they have absolutely no contact with the wild places. I know younger people who were raised in the city who are afraid of coming out to my place. They're afraid of it. They don't want to drive out of the city in case something happens" (Kate).

Bixler and Carlisle conducted a study of environmental educators in an effort to understand the fear of nature exhibited by urban students. Among the fears identified were those relating to snakes, insects, dirt and getting lost. (The latter even appeared among those students visiting a park in a large group and being led by an interpreter.) Interestingly, the third highest-ranked fear (identified by 73% of the students) was of non-indigenous animals such as lions and tigers (Bixler and Carlisle 24). These school children clearly were afraid of the unknown and had projected an image onto nature likely gleaned from television and other media.

It seems evident that most people are fearful of, or at least uncomfortable with, the unknown. One of my participants had grown up in the north and had a difficult adjusting to daylight hours in the south. "…in the summer I always had lots of sun. So when I first came here I had to leave the light on in my room because I was used to the light in the summer to sleep. But it was dark here and I knew that winter was over; spring had come so my whole system was geared towards 'okay now you're going to get lots of daylight'" (Monica). Clearly, familiarity breeds contentment and it follows that exposure to the wilderness can contribute significantly to finding a level of comfort within its bounds.

All of my own research participants had chosen to live in a rural environment, presumably without fear. Many of them had been born and raised in cities, but had sought out rural environments later in life. The common denominator appears to be their shared exposure to the wilderness throughout their youth, typically in the form of family camping trips. They were exceedingly grateful to their parents for providing them with these experiences and opening their eyes to the wonder of nature. Most acknowledged that those experiences provided the

foundation for not only their decision to live closer to nature but for a general love and appreciation for the natural environment.

> …my Mom was very big on taking us camping. She just knew that the best thing she could do for her family, her kids, was to give the camping experience. Then also growing up I was part of Boy Scouts and we used to come up to Wakefield all the time and we used to go skiing at Edelweiss. So I moved to Montreal, Peterborough and then I went overseas but I came back here. When animals are born, whether it's fish being spawned, they know how to find their way back home. So in a way that's what this was, I found my way back home. I always explore areas I did as a little kid when I came out here. There's something wonderful about that. (Tom)

Recreation professors Bixler and Carlisle's study of urban school children also concluded that increased exposure to the wilderness contributes to the reduction in fear associated with nature.

> Repeated positive exposure to wildland areas through field trips should eventually lower the novelty of wildland areas and build a sense of environmental competence. In their review of outdoor education program research, Crompton and Sellar (1981) concluded that length of exposure to natural environments may be the single most important variable in program success. Direct experiences in wildlands must cause students to reconsider many of the beliefs they acquired through media depictions and hearsay. (Bixler and Carlisle)

There is much more to be gained through immersion in nature than reduced anxiety: the comfort level will deepen into a stronger relationship with the natural environment.

> 'There is fortunately a way of life in free nature that is highly efficient in stimulating the sense of oneness, wholeness and in deepening identification' (Naess). But one who wishes to arrive at a proper spiritual perception must first get away from the city's artifice and distractions because 'it takes time for the new milieu to work *in depth*. It is quite normal that several weeks must pass before the *sensitivity* for nature is so developed

> that it fills the mind. If a great deal of technique and apparatus are placed between oneself and nature, nature cannot possibly be reached. (Naess as cited in Taylor "Part 1" 181)

One interviewee noted the need for children to be separated from the media that is so much a part of their lives.

> ...when you think about all those hours that are spent in front of screens or in some form of media. If you take that away from our lives there's space for something else. And for a lot of people that something else was to be more connected with the world. I do feel like there's a real isolation in our lives with these media that make us not want to cross that line so much. (Carolyn)

Carolyn worked at the Experimental Farm in Ottawa before moving to her own farm in Wakefield. During her tenure there, she played host to the field trips from local schools who came to the farm. "Children from urban settings came into contact with animals and plants and food in general for the first time in their lives. It was amazing what we saw, like the transformation, the awe, the amazement that lived in these children and adults as well." (Carolyn).

While an irrational or exaggerated fear of the wilderness will hinder the development of a deep relationship with it, a healthy level of respect for nature's power is not only prudent but necessary. The key is to understand the difference. This respect, awe and reverence for nature's strength and severity can be found in the writings of virtually all environmentalists: Thoreau, Berry, Leopold, Muir. It was also addressed by many of my interviewees: "it's something to be respected and something to be honoured" (Jeff).

In this increasingly urbanised society, fear of nature undoubtedly contributes to a diminished relationship with the natural environment and a reduced likelihood of finding the divine within it.

Ontological Shift (The Knowing)

At the heart of my research lies the possibility and viability of resacralising the natural world. The overwhelming majority of my research participants already live in a sacred wilderness. In fact I chose them because of this. I was therefore startled to find myself more heavily influenced by the two participants who denied having any spiritual tendencies. They are a young couple, both of them having given up their life in the city to pursue careers as organic farmers. Jeff describes his relationship with the natural world in what seems to be highly spiritual terms: “It’s a connection to something larger than myself and something that I revere and I feel is sacred in the sense that it’s something to be respected and something to be honoured” (Jeff). Carolyn has “a tremendous respect for what nature is and its potential and the challenges that it throws at us and the harshness and the beauty and all that… definitely come from a space of utter awe and respect for what happens in nature and the cycles of it. So for us our practices are based on a mutual respect—we see it as a relationship” (Carolyn).

Their detailed descriptions of their farming and wild harvesting activities resonated at a very deep level for me: they described my vision of a sacralised natural environment from an a-spiritual position. Their stance was supported by casual conversations that I had over the lifetime of this project: many people feel deeply connected to the natural environment but also very firmly eschewed any terminology that suggested religion or spirituality. As Michael disclosed in his interview “I have to be careful because the progressive world in general looks upon the Church and any kind of God talk as suspect and suspicious…a lot of them are like ‘don’t bring that church stuff into the conversation’” (Michael). I came to understand that while my vision of a resacralised natural environment was relevant, my terminology was not. The respect and awe for nature that I understand to be highly important to good environmental praxis might be embraced on a far broader scale if it was not based on a religious or spiritual framework. While I firmly maintain the belief that the desacralisation of nature—influenced by the migration of humanity’s gods from the natural world to the heavens—was largely

responsible for our current environmental crises, I no longer look to a resacralisation of nature as the primary remedy. We do not have to invest nature with sanctity, nor do we have to populate it with deities in order to treat it with reverence and respect.

This conclusion, of course, leads to more questions. If humanity's respect for nature does not stem from a religious or spiritual foundation, where does it come from? How can it be taught and understood? When describing their relationship with nature, many of my participants told stories from their childhoods. These often involved feeling the pull of nature, sensing a deep need—typically at very young ages—to engage with the natural world. Carolyn spoke of digging up her family's urban back yard to plant things, and Sharon told of risking her father's wrath to save a Luna month from being pinned as a trophy. Virtually all of my interviewees felt this respect and awe for nature regardless of their religious beginnings or the location of their family home. They share a similar ontology that oftentimes didn't match that of their family or social group. None of them expressed it as such, and I came to refer to it throughout my research process as 'the knowing'. Virtually all of the participants seem to have arrived at their understanding of the human/nature relationship in an organic way: it was not preached to them nor did they learn about it in an academic environment. They just knew.

This ontological shift, I now believe, is what is required for humanity to reverse the environmental crises we face today. Rather than turn to religious or spiritual means we must develop a "deep ecological consciousness" (Devall as cited in Taylor "Part 1" 181). Caroll et al, editors of *The Greening of Faith: God, the Environment, and the Good Life*, present an argument for the need to included religion in environmental activities. They posit that the need for a religion-based environmentalism stems not from a sense of desperation that science/technology has let us down, nor from a delusion that a divine saviour will spare us from the destruction of the planet. Rather, "we need an ecology of wonder and enchantment, a spiritual awareness of the intrinsic value or epiphany that nature manifests, and the proper sense of gratitude, humility and awe that goes with it (Carroll, Brockelman, and Westfall 4). The

conclusion drawn here could just as easily point to the ontology described by my interviewees as to a Nature-Based religion. Though based on differing belief systems, the visions are identical.

Religion and spirituality have a significant role to play in environmentalism, but they make up only a portion of contributing factors. The question of what religious group should lead the charge, raised in the introduction to Section Two, now seems irrelevant. They all should. We need to nurture the ontological shift—'the knowing'—among all of humanity, both religious and secular. The label that we choose to apply is irrelevant; it is the vision and the praxis that will guide us.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to identify the genesis of the ontology or to pursue methods to nurture it. However, my research did touch briefly on these issues as they arose. The notion that humanity shares an innate intimate relationship with nature is neither new nor simple. The idea has been approached from many angles over the ages in both religious and secular circles. Zen Buddhists John Stanley and David Loy belong to the former group: "spontaneous affinity with the natural word is our natural state…there is a link between a love of nature, deep spiritual experience and our moral sense" (37). They go on to explain "by using the words spirit and spiritual, we are not referring to a religious belief system or to anything supernatural. We are referring to the fact that we are spiritual animals" (Stanley and Loy 38).

In the 1980s, biologist E.O. Wilson used the term *biophilia* (originally coined by Erich Fromm) to describe "the innate tendency to focus on and affiliate with life forms and life like processes…To the degree that we come to understand other organisms, we will place a great value on them, and on ourselves" (Wilson 1-2). Biophilia is a biological urge that must be nurtured: it will atrophy in the absence of contact with the natural world (Kellert vii-viii). The biophilia hypothesis appears not to have gained much traction, and received considerable criticism (e.g.Joye and De Block 189-215), however it takes a few small steps towards explaining the ontology expressed by my research participants. The biophilia hypothesis aligns

with the understanding that proximity to nature is required for an affinity to develop (as noted in the Fear of Nature sub-section), and as an innate phenomenon, explains why my participants knew their truth from a young age.

During the interview process, I asked the participants if this ontology could be taught; if humanity could learn to understand the connectedness of all life, the close affinity with the natural world and the reverence and respect for nature that most of them invested with spiritual significance. The unanimous reply was that all these things could indeed be learned, many of them using themselves as examples. All of them (save for Monica, an Indigenous woman) grew up in households where these sentiments and beliefs were absent, yet they all came to adopt them. None of them, however, was able to describe their own learning process with any clarity. While many provided details of their spiritual paths, these demonstrated a search to validate what they already knew, rather than a road towards new knowledge. They were looking for systems or organisations or written words to embody what they already understood to be true. "Any books that I have read have been like 'thank you, thank you for the affirmation, thank you for the validation' because it has been so different from the nuclear family that I grew up in where that was really discounted and kind of pooh-poohed and off in the clouds of my thoughts" (Naomi).

The sole exception is Tom, who always had a love of nature but didn't exhibit the same ontology as the other participants at an early age. Rather, it was as an adult when working for an environmental NGO in Tanzania and later with Indigenous people in Canada that he came to understand the connectedness of all life (and not incidentally that the environmental 'industry', rooted in science, was going about things the wrong way).

> I met the people called the Barabaig in Northern Tanzania and what hit me so strongly was their connection with nature. And they had all these sacred rituals that were basically protecting the common properties. The water, sacred trees, they had it…. It switched to working with Indigenous people here in Canada and again absolutely

> amazed of the parallels between their philosophies and their approach toward nature and what I was seeing in Africa…. It was fascinating but it changed something in me, my approach towards nature changed. It's like something opened up in me, it's hard to explain… So over time I started realizing that this is just not working and we need to become more aware of the subtleties of things like Indigenous knowledge and take a cue from elsewhere, not from our religion or from what we've been indoctrinated into… whether it's science or whatever. So that was the shift from Catholicism to this more holistic way of looking at nature. (Tom)

We see in rituals such as the Council of All Beings, an effort to teach, learn and adopt this way of understanding nature. Several of my interviewees suggested that the ontological shift doesn't require complicated measures; simple exposure to nature will have the desired effect. In fact it was suggested that 'the knowing' is present in all of us and that it just needs to be accessed. "Kids are actually naturally drawn to nature; they're still close enough to their own beginning that the echoes in nature resonate with them. They're still close enough to it. They haven't forgotten" (Kate). Sharon sees it as evolutionary process. As society has changed we have lost many of our natural abilities. "Oh I think it's innate in all of us…These gifts need to be reactivated, recalibrated. It's there, we just don't know how to access it. But we're learning. And we all have it, we were born with it, we're all one being. So of course we're all just very different and unique manifestations of the divine" (Sharon).

Within New Age circles, these notions are being tied to quantum theory. It is suggested that the knowledge of our ancestors, once easily accessible to all humans, has been lost. This idea serves to explain the 'supernatural' powers attributed to the shamans within the Australian Aboriginal and other hunter/gatherer societies. It is believed that science is now starting to explain and unlock these ancient mysteries.

> The spiritual traditions that I'm describing are the core principles of ancient and time-tested understandings — principles now confirmed by 20th century science that include

> the interconnected nature of all things, the power of the human heart to positively influence the magnetic fields of the earth and all life, and the cyclic nature of life, climate, civilization and change. The spiritual traditions of our ancestors got these principles right and embodied them at the core of their lives in their time. It's the marriage of these holistic principles with the best science of today that helps us to tip the scales of life, balance, and peace in our favor. (Braden)

The Future

Many of the interviewees, in alignment with much of the New Age community, believe that humanity is in a time of great transition. This is variously attributed to the beginning of the Age of Aquarius, the end of the Mayan calendar, the scientific unlocking of ancient ways of knowing, the current situation of environmental crisis or any number of other influencing factors. Wendy believes that our current situation simply cannot be sustained. "But we're in this interesting time of transition, with some of the old ways of doing things dying out (race against race, religion against religion). I think this is going to finish crumbling because I don't think it's sustainable and I don't think it's what people want anymore" (Wendy). For Naomi, the transition is like a rebirth, accompanied by all the pain that birth entails:

> And when that baby comes out it's in a completely different world, very different from what it has known, but it had to go through that push and discomfort—it was too big for the space that it was in, it had to shift and change, the baby had to start to use the lungs and the body and the sounds and all of that. And I feel almost like this is what's happening on a big scale right now. If we look at the earth as a whole, at humanity as part of connection with the earth as this one big organism as opposed to every one of us individually, as a bigger piece, this is the push that I think and I believe is happening—pushing us towards this deeper…we don't know what it is, it's the unknown, we can't say

specifically, we don't know exactly what it looks like because it's not where we're from, we're going into something new. (Naomi)

My research participants were comfortingly optimistic in their vision of the future. They see humanity transcending our current state into a more unified, compassionate, sustainable future. Many feel that things may get worse before they get better, and there was little consensus among them regarding the form that leadership in this endeavour might take. Ben is "seeing now in the age of technology and communication great hope for humanity. It's allowing individuals worldwide to band together and have a voice. There's so much information going around that the power is starting to be spread now into humanity" (Ben). Michael sees a union of spirituality and science.

> I think the intersection between a non-hierarchical spiritual experience and a fully understood and respected science is coming together to make that possible….And I think in the end, science (and I mean economic science as much as physical science) is going to have to highlight that [unsustainable growth] is not going to work. And hopefully our understanding of how interconnected we are on the physical science side of things is going to help us better understand that. And maybe that will lead to an even greater understanding spiritually. I mean if we understand the science behind the interconnectivity maybe we can understand the importance of expressing that beauty through a faith lens. (Michael)

Most of them see change beginning at a grass roots level, presumably based on their shared mistrust of Western world leaders. Inevitably, the shift involves a change in consciousness on a large scale—something that they feel that they are contributing towards in their own ways.

> I feel like as we change inside there's no other choice but for solutions to manifest in the outside world. More people will let go of the old consciousness, which is based on fear and greed, and embrace the new consciousness that's based more on love and on

acceptance and on understanding and on connecting with the natural environment. More and more people are claiming that they're 'waking up' and that all of a sudden they're talking about consciousness and about this oneness connection that we have. (Jessica)

There will be some technological changes but there will also be a mass conversion. There won't be a big ceremony; it will be a real change of consciousness. People will be working on the technologies, those are essential pieces, but this change of attitude thing will have more people say 'I am a steward' or 'as a spiritual being…' change how they view the world. (Daniel)

There's just something wrong with the argument that technology will save us—it's not taking responsibility. We've got way more power than we think we do. It's about creating value—what solutions can you find that can be super-creative—it doesn't have to be so technological. It can be much bigger than that. (Allison).

In a similar vein, Tucker and Swimme believe that there is a new consciousness arising that focusses on interconnection rather than individualism. Humanity is not adrift alone in a vast hostile universe but rather shares a kinship with all life. Paul Raskin refers to this as the Great Transition while Joanna Macy calls it the Great Turning (Tucker and Swimme 50). For both Ben and Sharon, technology provides a place-holder for the new consciousness and will lead us back to a more perfect state of being.

Technology is just a prosthesis for what we would have had if we had completely clear life, completely clear connection with all our relations around us. We wouldn't need an iPhone™ we could do it with our mind. We're just getting back through technology to where we should have been in the first place. We're just coming back home through technology for now to eventually find balance and find way more than technology could offer us through the miracle of the biological spiritual being that we are. Not only is it

> possible that we evolve, we're already doing it. We're already in some of the most beautiful and profoundly changing times humanity has known. (Ben)
>
> Gregg Braden puts it this way: generations ago, everything was inside of us. We had amazing gifts, we had maybe seventeen senses, we were gifted with telepathic abilities, all of those occult things. We had those gifts, we had those powers. Over time they kind of got buried and forgotten. So we have externalised it because we've forgotten how to do it internally. So all the computer stuff, all the technology, it's the same really, we've externalised that. (Sharon)

Deep ecology moves beyond a vision of humanity as stewards of the earth to one where humans are interrelated and interdependent with the rest of the natural ecosystem. Unfortunately, even deep ecologists still see the world through a lens of separation. "We rarely experience our consciousness merged into the oneness of the world around us, as for example exists with Indigenous peoples for whom even the idea of an individual being separate from their environment does not exist". We therefore "need to make the shift into a holistic consciousness, a consciousness that sees the whole in every part" (Vaughan-Lee).

My research participants believe that humanity is currently undergoing this shift, and is consciously engaged in making it happen. They are active contributors to the process and look optimistically towards a brighter future.

SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

My literature review, in concert with the input provided by my research participants, has underscored the importance of the religious/spiritual voice in the world of environmentalism. I see the religious and spiritual communities (as I have defined them) playing complementary roles in this regard, following differing—yet equally important—calls to action.

In religious circles, the words of the prophets and sacred texts carry significant weight among adherents. This has been made clear both in my secondary research, which traces the roots of environmental perspective back to sources such as the First Testament, as well as among my research participants who felt called to environmental action based on the words of their prophets (e.g. Bahá'u'lláh, Buddhist lamas). These more institutionalised organisations, with their ability to reach large congregations, have the great potential—and responsibility—to advocate for positive environmental action. We see an excellent example of religious leadership at work in the environmental arena in the form of the Papal Encyclical published on June 18. A call to action not just for Catholics, but all of humanity, the Encyclical beseeches us to (among many other things) care for the natural environment, “our common home”. The importance of such a directive from arguably the most powerful religious figure on the planet cannot be overstated.

Within spiritual circles, sacred scriptures are less abundant; the voices of prophets and leaders less powerful. Just as their spiritual paths are personal for many within this group, so too are their contributions to environmentalism individual and unique, drawing from a wide variety of sources. The belief, held widely among adherents of spiritual movements, that individual practices such as meditation and prayer contribute to a greater good on a universal scale, may indeed have merit. At a more tangible level, their personal care for the natural environment, through such measures as vegetarian diets and reduced use of non-renewable resources, contributes to its overall well-being. These are people at the grass roots level who, in

living their own sense of what is right, can lead by example, advocate for change and participate in activism.

My research set out to determine if the resacralisation of nature, achieved through the efforts of traditional religions and emerging spiritual movements, could promote positive environmental action. While much of the literature supported this premise, I came to alter my stance on this issue to some degree as I conducted my personal interviews. In order for our environmental crises to be reversed, humanity must develop a new sense of respect and awe for nature, one that emphasises the importance and shared experience of all life. This, I now believe, will occur not by investing nature with the divine, but through an ontological shift that will bring us to this understanding. There are those, like many of my research participants, who have experienced this shift and who attribute it to a spiritual awakening. They believe that their deeply-held sense of interconnection with all elements of the natural world springs from their recognition of a divine presence within it. I make no effort to diminish this belief: it is a valid worldview that promotes positive environmental action and likely enriches their lives in many other ways. Indeed, for many people, the understood manifestation of the divine in nature leads directly to positive environmental action. However, I view the spiritual aspect of this awareness to be just one manifestation of a broader ontology.

This ontology—what I referred to in my research as 'the knowing'—was present in all my research participants, regardless of their religious or spiritual identification. Their respect for the natural environment, their sense of interconnectedness with nature, their compassion for all of life were universally felt. This, I believe, is what humanity must adopt on a large scale in order to correct our environmental situation. The resacralisation of nature is not necessary for us to succeed in this endeavour, and may at times even prove counterproductive. Conversely, a secular worldview can still result in a deep respect for nature and benign, sustainable environmental practices.

As was demonstrated by my participants, the exposure to nature, especially at an early age, can be a significant contributor to the development of this ontology. By immersing ourselves in nature, we are able to develop a connection with it, opening the door to a deeper relationship. In our increasingly urbanised society, we are often denied this exposure, effectively segregating humanity from the rest of the natural world. Humanity needs to be reintroduced to the natural world. We need to spend time in it, to understand it, to revel in it and to respect it. This, I believe, will lead us to a profound way of knowing the world that will allow no other course of action than the utmost care, management and protection of our planet.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW FORMAT AND SCRIPT

Introduce myself and explain the research

Ensure that the subject understands the contents of the waiver (e.g., volunteer aspect, right to not answer questions and so on)

1. What is your occupation?

2. What religion or spiritual movement do you currently identify with?

3. Can you talk a little bit about your spiritual path and how you came to be affiliated with this religion/movement?

4. If a religion is identified: What is your understanding of your religion/spiritual movement's position on humanity's relationship with the natural environment? **OR**, if no religion/movement was identified: What is your position on humanity's relationship with the natural environment? (Prompt for clarification regarding the sanctity of nature if it is not raised spontaneously by the participant.)

5. If not previously answered: Did the nature of humanity's relationship with the natural environment influence your decision about where to align yourself spiritually?

6. How does your understanding of the human-nature relationship translate into your day-to-day activities?

7. How important is the human-nature relationship to you? Does it impact:

    a. Where you live
    b. What you do for a living
    c. Who you vote for

8. In your opinion, do you think that people generally are more concerned about the human-nature relationship now than they were in the past (~20, 30, 50 years ago)?

9. If relevant: In your opinion, do you think that the number of people who share your understanding of the sanctity of nature is growing?

10. Do you agree with the following opinion? Why or why not?

    The desire to invest nature with sacred significance may be unattainable for people who choose this belief system, as opposed to those who are born and raised in a culture where this ideology is taken for granted.

11. If you could see 50 or 100 years into the future, what do you see as the state of the natural environment?

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Personal Interviews (all names are pseudonyms)

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Ellen
Kate
Jessica
Wendy
Allison
Monica
Naomi
Pamela
Sharon
Michael
Ben
Daniel
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Jeff