

---

# ENVIRONMENTAL SPIRITUALITY: GROUNDING OUR RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Susan Baker<sup>1\*</sup> and Robin Morrison<sup>2†</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Cardiff School of the Social Sciences, Cardiff University, Glamorgan Building,  
King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff, CF10 3WA, Wales, UK*

<sup>2</sup> *Church in Wales, 39 Cathedral Rd, Cardiff CF11 9XF, Wales, UK*

(Received 15 April 2008)

---

## Abstract

Climate change calls us to examine our understanding of our place within, and relationship to, the natural world. At heart this is a spiritual search, which has deep resonance with our being.

A spiritual search stresses developing: 1. awareness of self; 2. consideration of the impact on others; 3. feeling of universal connectedness. These three characteristics of lived spirituality are used to explore environmental spirituality.

A distinction is made between 'environmentally motivated spirituality' and 'spiritually motivated environmentalism'. Discussion on environmentally motivated spirituality leads to an exploration of Deep Ecology and consideration of principles of equity. Here we argue for a transactional view of the relationship between self and nature. We also develop a principle of ecological integrity, which posits a hierarchical interdependency between economy, society and nature.

Developing an environmentally motivated spirituality has normative consequences and thus is part of the development of an environmental ethics. An environmentally motivated spirituality is both a prerequisite to and grounds our spiritually motivated environmentalism. Ontology comes before Ethics. Promoting sustainable development requires the utilisation of the energy of creation and the enhancement of our synergy with God as creator. This fundamental Christian belief could constitute our spiritual approach to the task. We conclude by briefly exploring spiritually motivated environmentalism as it relates to the construction of environmentally sustainable approaches to climate change.

**Keywords:** Creator; Creation, Lived spirituality, environmentally motivated spirituality, spiritually motivated environmentalism, Deep Ecology, transactional view of nature, Environmental ethics, climate change

---

\* e-mail: [bakerscm@Cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:bakerscm@Cardiff.ac.uk)

† Bishops' Adviser for Church and Society

## **1. Conceptual Exploration**

We now hear almost on a daily basis about the ecological disasters that are occurring around the world. These range from resource depletion, species extinction, rising pollution and climate change to population explosion and over-consumption. This crisis can be seen as a call to improve our systems of environmental management, to develop more effective and efficient technologies and to better manage our waste. However, this view focuses only on the very superficial level. The environmental problems we face are far more challenging than this. This is because the cause or the origins of our environmental crisis lie not merely with the failure of management systems, or the failure of technology, or a failure to galvanize the public to recycle. Our ecological crisis is the result of a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of our relationship with nature and the natural world, that is, with Creation itself. The environmental crisis calls us to re-examine our understanding of nature, and our place within, and relationship to, the natural world [1]. In Christian terms, this is a call to examine our relationship with both Creation and the Creator. Creation is the theological construct for the whole of the natural environment, including human agency within it.

From a Christian perspective, this re-examination takes place in the context of the development of Ecological theology and Environmental ethics, which are, in turn rooted in ontology, particularly the Ontology of Creation. The Christian context for Ecological theology and Environmental ethics is constituted by first order beliefs about God's relationship with the whole of Creation. While the way the being of God is understood is central and foundational, historically, Ontology has taken many different forms and has been expressed through a variety of different narratives. These narratives both reflect and influence historical conditions and circumstances and create their own spiritual and cultural paradigms. As reflective context, Ontology creates its own narrative framework within which different forms of spirituality and culture develop. In turn, these shape subsequent ontological stories or worldviews. These beliefs also point us in the direction of Ontology as the context within which ethical approaches are formed. Ethics are both constructed through and underpinned by ontological beliefs and their spiritual practices, including their theological content.

Ontology, understood as the way we conceptualize the nature of being, usually involves beliefs about the character and purpose of Creation, as found in different creation myths. The Ontology of the pre-Copernican world had its own particular approach to Cosmology. Specific moral imperatives emerged to support that Cosmology. The Hebrew and Christian scriptures reflect such a pre-Copernican cosmology, presenting our post-Copernican world with particular challenges in its usage of creation narratives. Living in a quantum age, modern science is searching for unifying paradigms for the 'theory of everything', which has its own cosmological implications. This work is important for any one interested in relating environmental ethics to contemporary creation myths,

Cosmology and Ontology. It opens up new insights about matter, energy and the forces involved in the creation of the Universe, which requires interpretation and understanding within a Christian framework.

A literalist or fundamentalist approach to Scripture legitimates the cosmology of the text - without contextual qualifications - having identified its meaning with the nature of divine revelation. A more liberal approach to the same Cosmology explores the significance of the Scripture as a diversity source for learning more about God's revelation and their implications for our actions. An example would be the Babylonian/Persian setting for the priestly writers and editors work in Genesis 1, as they struggled to understand and live within *creation continua* as the framework for understanding *creation prima*. (The ECEN Creation Theology Group in Geneva, under the leadership of the late Lucas Vischer, who died in March of this year, has done very significant work in this area.) While a previous generation of scholars focused on the influence of Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Canaanite creation myths on the Hebrew versions, more recently there has been a new appreciation of the positive influence of the Persian 'liberation' of Babylon and Darius' edict of toleration on the language used for God in Genesis 1. Two examples of this positive influence might be:

1. *-elohim* plural as well as singular name for God, rather than the Hebrew nationalist or tribal name *Jahweh*;
2. -the more inclusive approach to all human beings as made in *image and likeness of God*, rather than just the priest/king in Babylon as the vice regent of God or the statues carried round the temple in the New Year festival.

If we applied the import of point 1 to our present concerns, we might say that where religion has been used to encourage nationalism and narrow self serving views of God, it risks supporting a reduced self interested local, regional or national view of the global implications of the environmental crisis. Point 2 reminds us that the moral value, agency and responsibility of all human beings are related to their created relationship with the Creator. Later Theology – particularly the Cappadoccians – affirmed the co-creating priestly role of all human beings and a contemporary Western theologian - Margaret Barker *inter alia* - has connected this role with the early cosmic covenant hinted at in the Temple texts. The priestly role of all human beings, according to this approach, is to act in positive ways to further the work of Creation, with an emphasis on both responsibility to do so and the freedom to choose to do so within a covenant and relationship with God as Creator. The different Covenant relationships in the Hebrew Scriptures stressed both the Ontology of God and the ethical response of human beings.

In the Christian tradition, Love provides the dominant adjective used to describe the creating, redeeming and inspiring God. In developing ethical behaviour in relation to the environment, we might well gain from remembering that Christian ontology sees Love as the source within which creation takes place. If Love provides a description of the being and nature of God, then this presents not only a basis for understanding how the Creation came into being,

but an ontological framework within which human responses to nature's existence are constructed and evaluated. This brings us directly to a discussion on the significance and implications of Love in relation the ontological and ethical status of the natural environment – that is, of Creation.

Love is a description of the being of God and the behaviour of God. If we say that God is Love, then this becomes both the source of creation and its purpose and motivation. (Professor Dumitru Staniloae's lectures at the Orthodox Theological Institute in Bucharest in the late 1960s explored this idea within the Orthodox and Byzantine tradition. Rev. Robin Morrison is grateful for the insights that attendance at these lectures provided.) As source, Love then is posited as the being of God which is the 'energy' of Love which longs for the 'other' to exist. This 'other' is the energy, forces and matter of the Universe, as witnessed in the continuing expansion of the Universe from the point of infinite singularity that preceded the Big Bang. The 'other' also includes human beings and their interrelationships, their capacity to create and communicate different kinds of knowledge, wisdom and information as an expression of their participation in the 'otherness' created by Love. Such participation leaves human beings free to act and learn in ways that either support or destroy the created relational potential of Love. This freedom reflects the purpose, content and processes implicit in the energy of Love. Love longs to create the conditions of freedom within which the 'other' can exist as wholly other – different from its Creator but also generative of a diverse range of personalities, cultures and relationships which sustain the embedded qualities of Love.

This view of Creation carries with it certain implications for action. The energy of love, which creates the conditions for the other to exist, comes from the ontology of God, which is Love. As such, ethical implications are implicit in this ontology because otherness (all organic and inorganic life) is part of creation and has its own integrities. There is a share ontological otherness across the diversity of separate matter and species.

Love provides the human other with the freedom needed – the ontological and ethical space – to discover and develop their own autonomous agency, their own capacity for self actualisation with all its risks, achievements and failures. All human beings are made in the image and likeness of this Love and carry the responsibilities this brings. They act as the hands of God on Earth, yet are free to choose. It is a radical freedom with a double edged capacity for goodness and for evil. To act in a Christian way, humans have to learn their own sense of responsibility for what they do and the affect this has on others and on the wider, natural environment. If Christians believe in the creation as an loving act of God and as a gift, and then behave in ways that leads to environmental destruction, they are turning against the very Love that allows them to have our own integrity as part of the 'otherness' of creation. If they act in ways that destroy the integrity of Creation, then they are turning away from their being and calling in Love. It is in this context that Christians have an obligation to deepen their relationship with the Creator by acknowledging the gift of creation that has been given as part of the 'otherness' towards which they have a co-creating relationship of

love. In short, a Christian ontology, with its focus on Creator and the gift of creation, provides the grounding for an Environmental theology as well as for an Environmental ethic.

We argue that there is a direct connection between Theology, Cosmology and the Spirituality which makes Theology live, with all its prompts for ethical behaviour. The work done on Creation theology is reminded that it dare not create a Christian ontological paradigm which turns away from the issues of creation to focus exclusively on the redemption which is in Christ. This would be to fracture the communality and sociality of the Trinity. It would leave Environmental ethics or Spirituality as a mere 'bolt on' to mainstream Theology. Sigurd Bergmann has excited our interest in the early Church's contribution here with his study of the Cosmology of the Cappadocians in his *Creation Set Free* [2]. These works remind Christians of the need to heal the separation that has occurred between two divergent, contemporary discourses – the one focusing on climate change that is resulting from human behaviour; the other discourse concerning itself with developing faith in a Creator, Redeemer and Inspirer, as the object of faith or Church activity separate from the any environmental concerns. To overcome this separation, Christians have to connect back to their fundamental story - the Creation myth - and their first order beliefs. This involves exploring the significance of Cosmology, and developing a new understanding of what it means to say they believe in a God who creates and what it means to say that, within the results of that creating, human beings have both freedom and responsibility.

There may be more leadership and creativity from other religious faiths in this field and it would be an insult to imply that only with a Christian ontology can there be a cosmological context for environmental ethics or spirituality. The point is that for Christians there is no choice. Belief in a Creator God provides an ontological paradigm that directly structures the contours of their spiritual praxis. There are many theologies and many spiritualities, all with their own perspective and positioning in the human story and each with its own ethical imperatives. But irrespective of these differences, for any faith position, Cosmology comes out of a 'first order' belief and that, in turn, underpins response to the challenges presented by our environmental crisis, and structures how to approach the task of developing a spiritually motivated and embedded environmentalism.

As such, the search for the origins of, and solutions to, our environmental crisis is, at heart, a spiritual search, with different reference points in the ontological contours hinted at above. We should not get anxious about this search. The search has deep resonance with our being. Humans have a profound need to understand their spirits. Being spiritual is part of being human and indeed it is seen as an integral component of what it is to be human. Spirituality is the core of human existence. From a Christian perspective, the spiritual journey has even deeper significance, for it aims at rekindling their relationship with both the Creator and the creation [3]. While the search should not make us anxious, it is not an easy or insignificant search: the spiritual dimension of our

lives is the most elusive and mysterious constituent of our human nature [4]. It is also the most demanding, in that awareness of the spiritual dimensions of our environmental crisis is also a call to action. Despite these difficulties however, we would argue that to live in a fractured world, where contemplation is separate from any praxis, is no longer a Christian option.

### **1.1. The meaning of Spirituality**

While all agree that spirituality is an inherent component of being human, - and the work of Danah Zohar *et al* on spiritual intelligence and spiritual capital is particularly instructive on this - it is also subjective, intangible, and multidimensional [5, 6]. Spirituality involves an individual's search for meaning in life, for wholeness, peace, individuality, and harmony [7]. Spirituality is culturally conditioned and enriched outside the narrow borders of any one particular religion.

Despite recognition of the centrality of spirituality for human existence, however, there is no consensus on a definition of the concept or what we understand by 'spirituality'. There is, nonetheless, agreement that spirituality entails certain attributes [8]. These include:

1. Belief and faith, which could entail believing in a higher power or God. It could also entail believing in significant relationships, self-chosen values or goals, or believing in the world without acknowledging God.

2. A sense of connectedness, which can be understood as how well one is connected to oneself, a supreme purpose or meaning, a higher power, or a significant relationship. To further clarify this, we could say that connectedness has vertical and horizontal components. The vertical component involves a person's relationship with a higher power or God and the horizontal component refers to one's relationships with others, the environment, and the self.

Connectedness may be expressed through activities such as prayer, presence, or physical touch [8]. The sense of connectedness gives a deeper meaning in and to life. In the same way, a lack of connection can be seen as a source of estrangement, and of loneliness, of spiritual pain and or distress.

3. Self-transcendence, which can be described as reaching beyond personal boundaries and attaining a wider perspective, which facilitates finding meaning in life's experience. Inner strength and self-transcendence are important components of spirituality.

4. Inner strength and peace come from having faith and a belief system.

From these attributes, it can be inferred that spirituality entails some form of a belief system. Spirituality and religion are often used interchangeably, but the two concepts are different. Spirituality involves humans' search for meaning in life, while religion involves an organized entity with rituals and practices about a higher power or God. Spirituality may be related to religion for certain individuals, but for others, such as an atheist, it may not be [7]. Nonreligious individuals also have spiritual needs in relation to the search for meaning and

purpose in life. In short, we take spirituality to be a much broader concept than religion.

### **1.2. Lived Spirituality**

Spirituality is also described as a *way of being* [4]. It is not just about grounding a meaningful and extensive way of knowing the world, but also about 'being in the world'. Spirituality can thus also be seen as something which is expressed. The spiritual dimension of our existence is actualized through our lived experiences. It grounds our choices about how to live, or how we wish to live. It can be expressed, for example through personal mechanisms such as meditation and music appreciation [8]. It can also ground social action. Christian spirituality takes the radical freedom of human agency seriously, seeing this as part of the nature of the ontology of Love that is present in the energy which produces creation. It is also deeply aware of the misuse of human agency, as well as committed to helping to realise its potential for transformation. It constructs its spiritual paradigms within this ontology and therefore has a capacity to challenge actions and beliefs that block wholeness and peace. As such, it focuses on both the transitional as well as the eternal. The Incarnation has already located it within the fragility of human systems and decision making.

We see Spirituality as having an intuitive, contemplative and action oriented character. As a journey, it stresses developing:

- an awareness of self;
- consideration of the impact on others;
- the feeling of universal connectedness [7, 8].

A spiritual journey moves through contemplation and reflection to action. When we discuss spirituality, or engage in spiritual dialogue, this can provide a mechanism for building spiritual community through engagement and action.

We now wish to use this understanding of the spiritual journey to explore how we might construct a new approach towards the environment. Our task is two fold: we wish to develop an approach that builds upon an ontology of creation, while at the same time we wish to show how this reflection extends outwards to structure an ethical framework for action.

## **2. Spirituality of the environment**

We start by making a distinction between:

- *Environmentally Motivated Spirituality*: This refers to people whose experiences in nature transcend the scientific, material environment.
- *Spiritually Motivated Environmentalism*: This is where spirituality provides guidance and motivation to work on environmental causes.

## 2.1. *Environmentally motivated spirituality*

The three characteristics of the spiritual journey outlined above are used to explore what we mean by an ‘environmentally motivated Spirituality’.

### 2.1.1. *Awareness of self*

An environmentally motivated spirituality rests on a particular view of nature, and of the relationship between the self and the natural world. Nature can be understood in many different ways. Nature as be seen as

- **Wilderness.** This view is often tied up with: (1) the idea that there is a pure, real nature ‘out there’ and that (2) the return to this nature, even if only for a short period, can be healing and that nature provides a place or a sense of retreat from the noise, the stress and the anxiety of everyday life.
- **Countryside or garden.** This is a more tame view of nature, often associated with a sense of cultural identity (for example, the English countryside), with past times (the pastoral landscapes of a better, bygone era); or indeed even with political projects such as the ‘back to the land’ movement, also known as the ‘neo-rural’ movement of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- **Urban environment.** This focus stems from a growing awareness that, for the vast majority of people now and more so in the future, their encounters with nature will primarily be within the urban environment. Here we see attempts to capture or recreate the ‘natural’ environment by developing city farms and inner city wild flower parks. Yet, we have only limited understanding of what nature means in an urban setting. At present we tend to understand nature as that which is apart from an urban setting, something that we have to ‘bring into’ the city for its inhabitants to experience and enjoy.
- **Global environment.** This view owes much to earlier works on the Gaia hypothesis by James Lovelock. Climate change, in particular, has focused on attention on nature as eco systems, as seen from a planetary perspective. Increasingly this understanding of nature is tied up with a deep sense of anxiety. Here nature is seen as under threat, from climate change, ozone depletion, deforestation, desertification, resource depletion. This is giving rise a politics of anxiety: fear for our future, distrust in the political system, including international environmental governance regimes such as the UN, to actually solve our collective problem and ensure our collective future [9-11].

Underlying these different views of nature there are also a different set of views about humans and their relation to nature and the natural world [12]. Implicit in western thought is the view that human beings are outside, even *above nature*. In this view, intrinsic value is seen as residing in human beings, with nature given only instrumental value, that is, it is valued only in terms of the use that nature can have for human beings. Here the term nature is often



replaced in our discussions with the term 'natural resource base'. Viewing nature instrumentally also leads to a neglect of the needs of other, non-human species and life forms. Here, man sets out to become the controller and master of 'his' environment.

In this view, human progress has come to be understood in a limited way, primarily in terms of increased domination over nature and the use of her resources solely for the benefits of humankind. Indeed, the domination of nature has become a key indicator of human progress [11]. Progress is seen, for example, in the clearance of forested land for agricultural production or in the use of natural resources, such as coal, oil and gas, to produce energy in the form of electricity that, in turn, drives production and transport. This is a profoundly anthropocentric view of nature. The anthropocentric view sees the wealth of nature only in relation to what it can provide in the service of humankind [13].

This view was not just confined to the business community, or to politicians, that is, to the economic or political elites. It also implicit in the early years of the western environmental movement, that is, during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, where the major concern of the movement at that time was with pollution (industrial pollution, nuclear pollution and threats) and resource depletion. Pollution was of concern because of its impact on human health; resource depletion was of concern because of its potential to undermine further economic development. In this view, the task of the environmental movement was to campaign (either through the existing political processes or via direct action) for environmental policy responses that promote a more human-centred approach to environmental planning and resource management, albeit worded in terms of developing more 'efficient', more 'effective', more 'inclusive', indeed even more 'just', system of environmental policy and planning.

This anthropocentric can be contrasted with an eco-centric view of nature and of human beings position positioning with respect to the natural world [13, 14]. This view stresses the 'intrinsic value' of the natural world, that is, the value that nature has over and above its usefulness to humans. In the eco-centric view, human beings are an intrinsic part of nature. Indeed they can be seen merely as a special strand in the fabric of life [15]. Underlying this is an environmentalism that presents a particular set of beliefs about how environmental resources are used. In contrast to the anthropocentric position, the ecocentric position allows nature to set the parameters of economic behaviour. Humans are seen as embedded in nature, not as apart from, or as above the natural world. As such, concerns about environmental planning and management are replaced by an attempt to construct a new 'externally guided' development model. This is aimed at creating a partnership, based on reciprocity, between human beings and nature.

The anthropocentric and the eco-centric positions each have important implications for the design and implementation of policies. The ecocentric approach focuses on the community level and espouses small scale, locally-based technology. The objective of environmental policy is that of maintaining social and communal well-being and is not merely limited to considerations of

the harmonious use of natural resources. Here there is greater emphasis on social purposes and values. In contrast, the anthropocentric approach can be distinguished by its *optimism* over the successful manipulation of nature and her resources in the interest and benefit of humankind.

This is not to suggest that we wish to present two juxtaposed positions: rather, that it is useful to see our attitudes towards nature as ranging along continuum. Many environmentalists who search for an environmentally motivated spirituality are closer to the eco-centric position than to the anthropocentric end of the continuum. Here, the development of the self, through ones spiritual journey, then becomes a task of both re-understanding and re-taking ones place in nature. For the Christian environmentalist, the spiritual journey is aimed at developing a sense of self as part of nature, through understanding Gods creation.

This understanding of the self as part of nature, as *in* and *of* nature, leads to the development of a new sense of humility. This opens us to a new task: to assess what we have achieved, what we have destroyed, and what we can still salvage in the years to come.

The Deep Ecology movement represents a very good example the eco-centric approach. Its philosophical roots are to be found in the works of Henry David Thoreau and later Theodore Roszak and Lewis Mumford. They are strongly influenced by the writings of Spinoza and of the teachings of Zen Buddhism [16]. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) can be considered another important influence. Deep Ecology holds three basic positions:

1. attributing equal value to all life forms;
2. seeking identification with non-human natural entities and systems;
3. advocating the development of policies that stress non interference and the harmony of human life and nature [17].

The substitution of human for natural capital is not allowed and gains in human welfare at the expense of radical transformation of the 'natural' environment are not tolerated. Deep Ecologists question the direction and goals of Western society, including its right to dominate and manage the Earth. Arne Naess, one of the principle philosophers in this school, says we should act by 'treading lightly *in* nature'.

However, in all of this discussion and in our attempts to develop an environmentally related Spirituality it is important not to see nature as somehow 'out there', detached from the social and the human. It is not that there is a pure nature, an untouched nature to which we can look to for inspiration, for guidance and to ground our sense of self. Nature, it is important to remember, also stands in a reciprocal relationship with human beings. Just as human beings are embedded in the natural world, and are shaped by it, nature too is continuously shaped by our interactions with our environment. There are no pristine wildernesses, not untouched nature. Nature is in a constantly changing, dynamic relationship with humans. This relationship can be beneficial to or harmful to humans, just as humans can interact in ways that support or disrupt natural eco-cycles and systems.

This brings us to a *transactional* view of nature [9, 10, 12]. This is a view where the self does not exist apart from the relations it has with both its social and natural environments. Social environments, for their part, have no reality apart from either the individuals that comprise them or the natural environments that sustain them. Natural environments can also be seen as both making certain forms of life and society possible, while in turn being modified by the forms of life and society that are actually created. From a transactional perspective, it is impossible to dichotomize the relationship between the human and the natural.

Here we can draw upon the classic Aristotelian notion that good selves cannot be produced in the absence of good societies and, conversely, that good societies cannot be produced in the absence of good selves. Aristotle's insight has been used to illustrate the transactional perspective on the ethical relationship that exists between individuals and society [12].

This insight also applies to the relationship between individuals and nature and the relationship between society and nature.

- In the first instance, good individuals cannot be produced in the absence of good natural environments and vice versa;
- in the second, good societies cannot be produced in the absence of good natural environments and vice versa.

Humans are, in this formulation, both political/social and natural beings.

### *2.1.2. Impact on others*

A spiritual journey is not a self-oriented journey. It is one that opens up to others. For Christians, this response is structured by the belief that the other is the result of God's creation, of the longing of Love. What do we mean by this when we seek to construct an environmentally motivated spirituality?

Two basic principles can form the corner stone of this construction:

- Intra-generational equity: refers to equity within our own generation;
- Inter-generational equity: refers to equity between generations, which is, including the needs of future generations in the design and implementation of current policies.

#### *2.1.2.1. Intra-generational equity*

This highlights the importance of meeting the basic needs of present generations, given the uneven pattern of global development. The notion of equity within generations owes much to the work of John Rawl's *A Theory of Justice* [18].

Adopting an intra-generational approach allows us to focus not just on the inequity in resource use between the North and the South, the rich and the poor, but at the same time to see poverty as both a cause and a consequence of unsustainable behaviour. This means that the development of an environmentally motivated spirituality becomes linked to dealing with issues of

power and the removal of the disparities in economic and political relationships between the North and South.

#### 2.1.2.2. Inter-generational equity

The idea of inter-generational equity dates as far back as the political philosophy of Kant, who developed the idea of posterity benefiting from the works of their forefathers. The philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1799) also wrote about the idea of intergenerational partnership [13, p. 40]. In considering future generations, we can in fact take the opposite view: we borrow environmental capital from future generations and that 'Our children will inherit the losses' that this brings (World Commission on Environment and Development, WCED, 1987: 8). Our present development model compromises, in many different ways, the ability of its future generations to meet their essential needs (WCED, 1987: 44). Rather than focusing upon the ways in which the actions of the present generation may help those of the future, (a view that is closely linked with the traditional understanding of progress) we focus instead on how today's unsustainable behaviour is narrowing the options available for future generations.

Our current over-exploitation of non-renewable resources provides an excellent example of this behaviour. Some green theorists have gone further, to suggest that our relations with other generations create obligations. But, they have also raised the question about how far into the future do these obligations stretch? Certainly, we should not restrict our concern to the next generation only, as many environmental problems or processes work on a very long term, 'glacial' time scale, such as radioactive waste and climate change. Considerations of inter-generational equity also raise another very difficult, political issue: how can future generations be given some form of agency in present policy making settings? The extension of democratic enfranchisement, for example, to those not yet living raises seemingly insurmountable issues. How can such people be represented? How do we know what their interests are? In addition to this problem, environmental management tasks, such as environmental policy making, planning, monitoring and evaluation, typically do not fit in with the longer term time frame needed to take account of future generations. Such considerations would thus appear to require considerable extension of the time frame of environmental policy and politics.

Other theorists have argued that the principle of inter-generational equity brings with it more stringent requirements. Dobson in particular has argued that the principle means that future generations human needs have to take *precedent over* present generation's human wants. He argues that it 'would be odd... to put the wants of the present generation of human beings (which might threaten those processes ahead of the needs of future generations of human beings (who depend upon them) [19]. Second, he argues, once the interests of future generations are taken into account, then concern for many features and aspects of the *non-human* natural world, can be generated. This would include concern for other species,

which might be essential prerequisites for future generations to meet their needs. However, deep ecologists would wish to expand this to argue that the future of the non-human world can not be grounded on human, utilitarian, interests but on the principle (borrowed from Buddhism) that the spiritually motivated environmentalists must ensure that all life forms are allowed 'their own form of unfolding'.

### *2.1.3. Universal connectedness*

Spiritually motivated environmentalism helps to build a feeling of universal connectedness precisely because its starting point is the recognition of our embeddedness in nature and the natural world. This embeddedness ensures a reciprocal relationship between human beings and nature.

We could say that this moves our *gaze*: from seeing the natural world as object – for example, as the object of our desire, to fulfil our desire *for* - such as things, goods and services, to seeing the natural world as subject. By this we mean that when we speak of nature as an object, then nature becomes little more than that which is of our making: that which is perceived or acted upon by use, the subject. The result in a particular understanding about how us, as subject, relate to the object, of nature. We become the observer and nature is that which we observed; we are the active one, nature the passive. This sets us apart, but also establishes a dualism: us/nature; nature as 'out there'; we as 'in here'; nature as given, there to be taken /us as developing, there to take advantage of and use. This brings us back to the idea of a spiritually motivated environmentalism – here we acknowledge the reciprocal, unfolding nature of the relationship between nature and humans. Indeed, such as form of environmentalism should allow this relationship to develop.

In many ways, the development of a spiritually motivated environmentalism is thus also the development of a politics of the environment. We don't mean here in the narrow sense of politics as political parties, - but more in the sense of a moral imperative to act. This is because a spiritually motivated environmentally leads us naturally beyond the politics of domination, which, we have argued is based on belief that we lie outside, or even above the natural world. Instead, it places us firmly within an action set that involves acknowledging, encouraging and developing our relationship with nature, what we may call the politics of reciprocity, based on a transactional view of nature, the self and society.

As a first step in this connection, we can begin by developing an Environmental ethics. This starts from the premise that the self, society, and nature as both constituting and being constituted by each others. We can call this the principle of ecological integrity. The principle of ecological integrity is more fundamental than the principles of social justice or personal well-being, precisely because it is more inclusive: it grounds the other two principles. The individual can be seen as a subset of society and society as a subset of nature. Thus, while nature can exist in the absence of individuals or societies,

individuals and societies cannot exist in the absence of nature. In other words, even though we subscribe to a transactional view of the relationship between self, society and nature, we also see a hierarchical interdependency between economy, society and nature: society is possible without a market economy, but neither society nor the market economy is possible without the natural environment. Human flourishing, social justice and environmental integrity are only at odds with each other only when we defines human well-being in terms of achieving the consumption and use of nature, in other words when we reduce nature, the self and others to objects not subjects.

In short, we would argue that developing an environmentally motivated Spirituality has normative consequences and thus is part of the development of an Environmental ethics. All ethics, in turn, we would argue, are calls to action. It is to this we now turn.

### **3. Spiritually motivated environmentalism**

Spiritual journeys aim at more than constructing a sense of being beyond the self. They construct our orientation to the Cosmos and our role within it. A spiritually motivated environmentalism embraces a cultural awareness of the interrelationship, some would even say kinship, with and dependence on the natural environment for the continuity of all life [20]. For Christians, the quality of kinship can be related back to our starting point, which is the centrality of Love as both ontology and ethical process. Here the exercise of freedom is crucial for human agency, but it also forms part of the project of co-creating in Love, which is turn implies that Christians are compelled to respect the integrity of Creation.

This brings with it a heightened awareness of the environmental consequences of our actions. It is not hard to see these consequences. We opened this talk my mentioned some of these, such as deforestation, desertification and more worrying of them all, climate change. Awareness of, and beliefs about, the seriousness of our environmental problems are elemental for inciting action. If environmental problems are not serious, then there is no reason to make personal sacrifices for nature. Similarly, awareness of the extended relationship between us and others, between the natural world and God's creation motivates both private and collective actions.

But, we are saying more than this: we have also said that there is a hierarchical interdependency between nature and society. In this sense, environmental values, or our environmentally motivated spirituality, ground our spiritually motivated environmentalism.

The development of a spirituality of the environment is also a call to action: it is, to borrow a phrase from Kant, an imperative to act. A key part of this action is to find ways to integrate environmental, economic and social considerations into a new development model. Because we are grounding our environmentalism on a spiritual footing, we have to recognize that it is no longer possible to see development in isolation from its ecological and social

consequences, that is from its consequences for the self, for others and for nature.

A spiritually motivated environmentalism drives us to construct a model of development that protects the planetary resources, be they physical, in the form for example of oil or gas, or systemic, in the form of the climate system, while also promoting their use.

This model has to be built upon normative principles that promote equitable access to the planet's limited resources in order to promote human needs, be they physical, cultural, spiritual or social. Equity extends across space, for example, between different geographical locations, as well as across time, for example, between generations and also operates across gender. In order to promote this new form of development a halt has to be put to two practices, typical within the conventional model of development:

The first allows the present generation to adopt a policy of *temporal displacement*, that is, pass the risks and problems of modernity down to future generations. The second is the *spatial displacement* of the negative environmental consequences of traditional development models. Spatial displacement is a process whereby a more powerful state or actor imposes environmental harm upon another, less politically or economically powerful, state or actor [21]. This can include displacing industrial pollution or depleting the environmental assets, such as biodiversity, of another region or country for one's own benefit. In addition to the spatial and temporal dimensions of the equity principle, the stronger the form of our spiritual environmentalism, the more weight that is given to the additional commitment to sharing access between species, that is, between human and other life forms.

In place of a resource intensive lifestyle, spiritually motivated environmentalism promotes forms of social change that protect the natural resource base upon which future development depends. This involves valuing nature and non-human life forms in an intrinsic way. This form of development model is not just aimed at protecting nature, but creating an ecological society that lives in harmony with nature. This means reconciling economic activity, social progress and environmental protection. In this model, the promoting of human well-being does not have to depend upon the destruction of nature. Here natural habitats are preserved to both maintain biodiversity and allow the continued evolution of non-human species and, of critical importance, with the economic system reconfigured to serve those goals.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The starting point of this paper has been the position that a spiritually motivated environmentalism can be positioned within the mainstream paradigms of Christian theology. For the Christian environmentalist, part of that spiritual journey involves a re-examination of human beings' relationship to the natural world, understood as Creation. This allows nature 'in' as it were, allowing the spirituality of the environment to invade consciousness. For Christians, however, the spiritual search reaches further: awareness of human beings' embodiment

within nature has, at one and the same time, a profoundly transcendent aspect: it links human beings individually and collectively to the transcendent dimensions of creation. But, we also argued that Ethics is inseparable from Ontology. In other words, the environmental crisis bring believers face to face with the task of constructing - individually and collectively, new attitudes of respect, reverence, responsibility, and care for that Creation.

## References

- [1] C.J. Khisty, *Syst. Pract. Act. Res.*, **19** (2006) 295.
- [2] S. Bergmann, *Creation Set Free: The Spirit as Liberator of Nature*, Eerdmans, Michigan and Cambridge, 2005.
- [3] M. Watson and D. Sharpe, *Green Beliefs and Religion*, in *The Politics of Nature*, A. Dobson and P. Lucardie (eds.), Routledge, London, 1993, 210.
- [4] J. Macquarrie, *Paths in Spirituality*, Harper & Row, New York, 1972, 43.
- [5] D. Zohar and I. Marshall, *Spiritual Intelligence, the Ultimate Intelligence*, Bloomsbury, London, 2000.
- [6] D. Zohar and I. Marshall, *Spiritual Capital*, Bloomsbury, London, 2004.
- [7] J. Dyson, M. Cobb and D. Forman, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, **26** (1997) 1183.
- [8] R.A. Tanyi, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, **39(5)** (2002) 500.
- [9] J. Barry, *Environment and Social Theory*, Routledge, London, 1999, 11.
- [10] N. Castree, *Social Nature: Theory, Practice and Politics*, in *Social Nature: Theory, Practics and Politics*, N. Castree and, B. Braun (eds.), Blackwell, London, 2001, 1.
- [11] P. Macnaghten and J. Urry, *Contested Nature*, Sage, London, 1998, 172.
- [12] R. Evanoff, *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, **16(3)** (2005) 107.
- [13] S. Baker, *Sustainable Development*, Routledge, London, 2006, chapter 2.
- [14] R. Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Towards an Ecocentric Approach*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1992, 26.
- [15] F. Capra, *The Web of Life*, Aanchor Books/ Doubleday, New York, 1996.
- [16] G. Sessions (ed.), *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Shambala, Boston, 1986.
- [17] A. Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, 29.
- [18] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971.
- [19] A. Dobson, *Justice and the Environment: Conceptions of Environmental Sustainability and Dimensions of Social Justice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, 46.
- [20] M. Tucker and J. Grim, *Daedalus*, *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Science*, **130(4)** (2001) 7.
- [21] A. Blowers, *Urban Studies*, **34(5-6)** (1997) 845.